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Security Council

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27 April 2016

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Letter dated 26 April 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Security Council resolution 2280 (2016), adopted on 7 April 2016, by which the Council decided to extend, until 1 July 2016, the mandate of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan as set out in paragraph 18 of resolution 2206 (2015).

Accordingly, I wish to inform you that, after consulting the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) concerning South Sudan, I have administratively extended the appointments and contracts of the five individuals currently serving on the Panel, whose contracts were to expire on 15 May 2016, until a new resolution is adopted by the Council regarding a further extension of the Panel's mandate.

I should be grateful if you would bring this matter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Letter dated 26 April 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1031 (1995), I have the honour to transmit the forty-ninth report on the implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, covering the period from 22 October 2015 to 15 April 2016, which I received from the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could bring the report to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Annex

Letter dated 18 April 2016 from the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina addressed to the Secretary-General

Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1031 (1995), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council reports from the High Representative in accordance with annex 10 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Conclusions of the London Peace Implementation Conference of 8 and 9 December 1995, I herewith present to you the forty-ninth report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would ask that the report be distributed to the members of the Council for their consideration.

This is my fifteenth regular report to the Secretary-General since I assumed the post of High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina and European Union Special Representative on 26 March 2009. The present report covers the period from 22 October 2015 to 15 April 2016.

Should you or a member of the Security Council require any information beyond what is provided in the attached report or have any questions regarding its contents, I should be pleased to provide you with that information.

(*Signed*) Valentin **Inzko**

Forty-ninth report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina

Summary

The present report covers the period from 22 October 2015 to 15 April 2016. The reporting period has been dominated by several notable developments, including the submission by Bosnia and Herzegovina of an application for membership in the European Union. Other developments include the adoption of entity-level labour laws; first-instance verdicts rendered by the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991, in the cases against Radovan Karadžić and Vojislav Šešelj; and public indications by the Republika Srpska authorities that the Republika Srpska referendum on the authority of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court and Prosecutor's Office, and on the authorities and decisions of the High Representative, will not go ahead.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina on their country's application to join the European Union and call upon domestic leaders to continue and to intensify efforts to advance the reforms needed for greater integration, so that they can secure the lasting stability and prosperity to which their citizens aspire.

I strongly support the efforts of the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to register the ownership of assets referred to as "prospective defence property" to the State, in line with the Bosnia and Herzegovina Law on Defence and relevant decisions of the Presidency, as a precondition for the activation of the country's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Membership Action Plan. I call upon authorities of the Republika Srpska to enable the registration of prospective defence property located on its territory to the State, as Federation authorities have been doing.

The decision of 15 July of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska to hold a referendum directly challenging the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was neither published in the Republika Srpska official gazette nor implemented during the reporting period. While welcoming the statements that the referendum has been put to one side, I also note that the decision of the Republika Srpska National Assembly has yet to be repealed. I note with concern that statements continue to be made by the President of the Republika Srpska suggesting that this or another referendum might still be organized.

Challenges to state-level judicial institutions have continued during the reporting period, the most notable of which was set out in a statement signed by the leading Republika Srpska-based political parties expressing their refusal to implement the 26 November decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the unconstitutionality of provisions of the Republika Srpska Law on Holidays, and conveying their threat to boycott state institutions if legislation concerning the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not adopted.

The reporting period was also marked by renewed statements by officials of the Republika Srpska calling for that entity's secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under the authority vested in me, I reiterate that the entities have no right to secede

from Bosnia and Herzegovina under the General Framework Agreement and that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina are guaranteed by the General Framework Agreement, the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and international law.

The reporting period saw Bosnia and Herzegovina mark the twentieth anniversary of the General Framework Agreement. While there is general recognition that the country has come a long way in the last two decades, there was very little euphoria, given the pressing social and economic challenges that many of the country's citizens continue to face.

A terrorist attack carried out by a single perpetrator in Sarajevo on 18 November resulted in the death of two soldiers of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The attack once again highlighted the challenge facing the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fight against terrorism. Ever closer cooperation between the authorities at all levels remains of paramount importance.

Sharply divergent reactions to the long-awaited verdicts of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia against Radovan Karadžić and Vojislav Šešelj reconfirmed the need for all relevant actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to proactively advance reconciliation and refrain from actions aimed at deepening divisions. In this regard, I was particularly shocked by the naming of a student dormitory in Pale (Republika Srpska) after Radovan Karadžić only two days before he was found guilty of genocide by the International Tribunal. Its high-profile opening by the President of the Republika Srpska sent an insidious message to those communities in the Republika Srpska affected by the wartime ethnic cleansing for which Karadžić was convicted in first instance.

Given the complexities of the environment which continue to prevail in the country, the presence of the European Union military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina with an executive mandate remains of vital importance, enabling my Office and others in the international community to fulfil our respective mandates as well as reassure citizens of all ethnic groups throughout the country of the safety and security of the environment.

I. Introduction

1. This is my fifteenth periodic report to the Secretary-General since I assumed the post of High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It provides a narrative description of progress made towards attaining the goals outlined in previous reports, registers factual developments, logs relevant citations relating to the reporting period, and provides my assessment of the implementation in key areas falling under my mandate. I have focused my efforts on addressing these areas, in line with my primary responsibility to uphold the civilian aspects of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this vein, I have consistently encouraged authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to achieve progress on the five objectives and two conditions necessary for the closure of the Office of the High Representative and have worked to preserve measures that have been taken previously to implement the General Framework Agreement.

2. My energies continue to be directed towards meeting my mandate, as defined under annex 10 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace and relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Additionally, my Office fully supports the efforts of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to help Bosnia and Herzegovina move along the path towards closer integration with those organizations.

II. Political update

A. General political environment

3. Overall, the environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been one of mixed developments. On the one hand, the country has taken long-awaited steps towards membership in the European Union, as evidenced by the submission of its membership application on 15 February and by the adoption of entity-level labour legislation. The readiness of the authorities to advance the reform agenda is the bright spot of the reporting period. I also welcome the statement made by the President of the Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, on 16 February, in which he announced that the Republika Srpska referendum on the Bosnia and Herzegovina judiciary and the authority of the High Representative would be put aside, although I do note that the decision of 15 July 2015 of the Republika Srpska National Assembly remains in place.

4. At the same time, the ongoing failure by the authorities to reach a resolution on issues such as the publication of the 2013 census results, the European Union coordination mechanism, the implementation of the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court on Mostar, and delivering on outstanding International Monetary Fund (IMF) requirements, points to the pressing need for the ruling coalitions to enhance their efforts to deliver results.

5. Moreover, the readiness of some political actors to question and challenge the General Framework Agreement, including new attempts to undermine the sovereignty and authority of the State and its institutions, continues to cast a shadow over positive efforts to advance economic and social reforms.

6. Two actions stand out in this regard. First, there was the explicit, public refusal on 29 November of the leading Republika Srpska political parties to implement the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court on the observance of the Day of the Republic on 9 January; and their threat to boycott the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina if the associated legislative changes demanded by them were not adopted.

7. Second, on 10 December, in response to a legally authorized police operation by the State Investigation and Protection Agency in Novi Grad, which included entry onto the premises of a Republika Srpska police station, the Republika Srpska government adopted conclusions declaring that the Republika Srpska government and all Republika Srpska institutions cease cooperation with the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court and Prosecutor and the State Investigation and Protection Agency. These conclusions were subsequently supported by the Republika Srpska National Assembly While the Republika Srpska authorities eventually resumed operational cooperation under a signed memorandum of understanding, this apparent interference of politics with police work was unacceptable, particularly at a time when agencies need to be strengthening their cooperation. Under the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution, the entities are explicitly bound to comply with the decisions of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

8. I must also note that the reporting period has been marked by a number of security-related incidents, including a terrorist attack in Sarajevo on 18 November which left two soldiers of Bosnia and Herzegovina dead.

9. Additionally, several events occurred during the reporting period, including reactions to the verdicts of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia against Radovan Karadžić and Vojislav Šešelj which once again highlighted the pressing need to advance reconciliation.

10. Ruling coalitions at the state and entity levels remained intact during the reporting period after the Party for a Better Future (SBB) replaced the Democratic Front (DF) in the ruling coalition at the Federation level in November. The Party for a Better Future looked set to enter the state-level coalition, until the party's president and its candidate for a ministerial post were arrested and charged by the State judiciary with obstruction of justice in February. This case is ongoing.

B. Decisions of the High Representative during the reporting period

11. During the reporting period, I continued to refrain from using my executive powers, in line with the policy of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council, which emphasizes "local ownership", in contrast with international decision-making.

C. Five objectives and two conditions for closure of the Office of the High Representative

Progress on objectives

12. It is regrettable that during the reporting period, the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina made limited progress towards meeting the outstanding objectives and

conditions set by the Steering Board necessary for the closure of the Office of the High Representative (the 5+2 agenda).

State and defence property

13. The term "prospective defence property" refers to a defined list of immovable assets which should be registered to the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with the Agreement on Succession Issues, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Law on Defence and relevant decisions of the Bosnia and Herzegovina presidency. In addition to being part of the conditionality for the participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the NATO Membership Action Plan, progress on this issue is one of the outstanding objectives set as a prerequisite for the closure of the Office.

14. The direct registration of prospective defence property continued during the reporting period. To date, at least 21 locations have been successfully registered under the ownership of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Several other prospective properties are at various stages of registration, including registration of usage rights. Despite expedited efforts by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Defence and Public Attorney's Office to move the process forward, there has been a noticeable slowdown in further registration of property in recent months due to technical legal issues.

15. Additionally, the above-mentioned progress has been made only in relation to defence properties located on the territory of the Federation. Several requests submitted by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Public Attorney for registration of specific properties located in the Republika Srpska have been rejected (in first instance) by field offices of the Republika Srpska Administration for Geodetic and Property-related Affairs. The reason cited was an alleged "non-existence of a valid legal basis", despite the fact that the relevant decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court, of July 2012, clearly determined that the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the titleholder of those properties, pursuant to relevant laws and regulations. Two of those decisions are currently under appeal, although there is little indication that the Administration for Geodetic and Property-related Affairs will change its views. A second-instance judgment is still outstanding in the property dispute before the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court regarding the Veliki Žep prospective defence location in the Han Pijesak municipality in the Republika Srpska. As elaborated in my previous reports, on 3 July 2015, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court rendered a first-instance judgment in this property dispute between the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, in which it explicitly determined that, based on and pursuant to the Agreement on Succession Issues of the successor States of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina has ownership rights over the property in question. In August 2015, the Republika Srpska filed an appeal against this judgment and the procedure before the Appellate Division of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court in the Veliki Žep case is ongoing.

16. Progress on the broader issue of how all State property assets are to be apportioned among the levels of government remains elusive. On 3 February, the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina rejected a draft law submitted by two parliamentarians. The Bosnia and Herzegovina House of Representatives then adopted a conclusion requiring the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers to prepare a draft law on the use and management of State property for

entry into the parliamentary procedure no later than the end of 2016. I hope that this conclusion will facilitate a breakthrough so that this issue can finally be regulated in line with the 2012 ruling of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court.

Fiscal sustainability

17. The Office of the High Representative continued to follow, analyse and inform international partners on developments related to fiscal sustainability, including developments in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Fiscal Council and Indirect Taxation Authority Governing Board. The Fiscal Council met once during the reporting period (on 10 November), focusing on a potential new arrangement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and IMF. The Governing Board of the Indirect Taxation Authority held five sessions, from which a new work practice emerged pursuant to which State and entity ministers of finance discussed and agreed on agenda issues in advance, thereby bypassing other members and narrowing the role of the Board to that of a simple endorser of their views. As a result, some items, such as the entity indirect tax revenue allocation coefficients and entity debt settlements, did not appear in the Board's agenda in the reporting period, despite Board regulations making regular coefficient adjustments and debt settlements obligatory.

18. Delayed adjustments of revenue allocation coefficients and debt settlements have also affected the Indirect Taxation Authority, which has been sued by both entities for loss of revenue resulting from such delays. This puts the Authority in a difficult position, since it is the entities themselves that have a decisive vote on the Authority Governing Board in decision-making on revenue allocation, while the Authority is responsible only for enforcement of Board decisions. Those lawsuits seek a total of about 25 million convertible mark (BAM) from the Indirect Taxation Authority. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court has yet to decide on the Authority's appeal against the final ruling by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina in favour of the Republika Srpska in one of these cases. I am concerned that this issue could ultimately undermine the financial stability of the Authority.

Brcko district

19. On 11 March, the Presiding Arbitrator of the Arbitral Tribunal for Dispute over the Inter-Entity Boundary in the Brcko Area, Roberts B. Owen, passed away. I would like to take this opportunity to mark with gratitude the immeasurable contribution that Mr. Owen made to entrenching peace and stability in the Brcko District and in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. His historic role in resolving the issue of the status of an area which was left unresolved at Dayton proved pivotal in making the Brcko District an example for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world of successful post-war reconstruction and reintegration.

20. Problems associated with the adoption of the Brcko District budget for 2015 and a break of over two months in the work of the government and the Assembly marred progress during the reporting period. The budget crisis followed the October ruling of the Brcko District Appellate Court, by which the 2015 budget was taken out of force owing to violations of the ethnic quorum requirements for its adoption. In order to ensure continued financing in the wake of the Court's decision, the District Assembly was forced to amend the District's Law on Budget to allow for temporary financing to be extended through the entire year. The institutions have yet to adopt a 2016 budget.

21. Blockage of the government and the Assembly began in January owing to a long-standing dispute regarding the construction of a mosque in the town centre. The Serb-dominated parties in the ruling coalition first blocked sessions of the government in reaction to the agenda which included the regulatory plan foreseeing the mosque's construction. The Bosniak-dominated parties responded by blocking the work of the Assembly. After two and a half months of blockage of the functioning of the District's institutions, the Supervisor engaged the parties, expressing concern regarding the situation and reminding them of their obligation to respect and implement the Final Award and the Statute. The disputed issue, while not resolved, was effectively put aside and both the Brcko District government and the Assembly resumed their work in March.

22. During the reporting period, my office continued to follow the process of adoption of financial laws related to the implementation of the Memorandum on Institutional Cooperation and Exchange of Data among the four tax administrations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These laws aim at improving transparency in the business environment, fighting the grey economy and harmonizing the District's legal system with that of the rest of the country. Action on the laws is now pending in the District Assembly.

Entrenching the rule of law

23. The Office of the High Representative facilitated the process of improving the immigration and asylum legal framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina through provision of assistance in developing the new law on foreigners and the law on asylum. The Office is also providing support for the preparation of lower-level legal acts needed to ensure proper implementation of the above-mentioned legislation.

D. Challenges to the General Framework Agreement for Peace

Challenges to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina

24. During the reporting period, officials within the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), the ruling party in the Republika Srpska, continued to advocate for the secession of the Republika Srpska and the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, thereby directly challenging the General Framework Agreement for Peace and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The President of the Republika Srpska, who is also President of SNSD, continued to be the most frequent and vocal exponent of State dissolution. Through his public statements, the President of the Republika Srpska continued: to claim, incorrectly, that the Republika Srpska is already a state,[1] and that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not

[1] "We are committed to the state. Just to be clear, we consider that Republika Srpska is a state." RS President Milorad Dodik, speech reported in *Vesti Online*, 19 March 2016; "Srpska is a genuine Serb's desire for freedom. No freedom without state, and the state we live in is called Republika Srpska." Republika Srpska President, *SRNA*, 28 February 2016; "My states are Republika Srpska and Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is the place where I have to live." Republika Srpska President, *RTS Upitnik*, 12 January 2016; "In essence, Republika Srpska since its formation on 9 January 1992 ... had all of the elements of a state." Republika Srpska President, *RTS Upitnik*, 12 January 2016; "Republika Srpska was formed on 9 January as a state, and it will continue to build its state-creating character." Republika Srpska President, *Sputnik*, 2 January 2016.

a state;[2] to threaten that the country would fall apart if certain conditions were not met;[3] to affirm that the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina was inevitable;[4] and to call for the future independence of the Republika Srpska.[5] He also claimed, incorrectly, that the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers is not a government.[6] The President of SNSD was joined by party colleagues who have argued that institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina have no authority over the Republika Srpska.[7]

Proposed legislation on the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court

25. Following the decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court concerning the provisions of the Republika Srpska Law on Holidays and the 29 November joint statement signed by the leading Republika Srpska-based political parties in which they refused to implement it, the Republika Srpska-based parties represented in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliamentary Assembly proposed a law on the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court, which would regulate the court's jurisdiction, decision-making and membership and certain procedural elements.

26. While according to the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliamentary Assembly may adopt a law (i.e., this is not obligatory) that will change the method of appointment of the three judges selected by the President of the European Court of Human Rights, the current proposal raises certain concerns. The law seeks to terminate the mandate of the three international judges currently serving in the Court and provide modalities for their replacement by domestic judges. Besides pointing out the fact that the draft law raises a number of issues under the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which foresees the presence of international judges, I have made it clear that the presence of international judges in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court is still critical at a time when the fundamentals of the Constitution are frequently challenged by political office holders. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional

[2] "Bosnia and Herzegovina is just an international border, an international recognition and nothing else, and Republika Srpska is a state." Republika Srpska President, *RTRS News* (speech in Batkovic), 25 February 2016; "Many people here don't understand nuances, and the nuance is in the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a state." Republika Srpska President, *RTS Upitnik*, 12 January 2016.

[3] "Maybe this is the last moment for Bosniaks to sit down and talk about political consensus in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with that economic [consensus]. If they won't, they risk being abandoned in the future and that Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be in the frame in which it is now." Republika Srpska President, *Vijesti.ba*, 18 February 2016.

[4] "Bosnia doesn't have to function and there's no chance that Bosnia will function. It's a temporary, impossible country." Republika Srpska President, *RTS Upitnik*, 12 January 2016.

[5] "I believe that Republika Srpska can one day become an independent state. The Bosnia and Herzegovina we have is not a place where any people can affirm its national, economic and political capacity." Republika Srpska President, *Vijesti.ba*, 2 February 2016.

[6] "On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a government, only the Council of Ministers — according to the Constitution, an auxiliary body to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency ... And now you have someone somewhere saying that Bosnia and Herzegovina has a government. Here lies the problem. If we allow the Council of Ministers to work as a government, the Republika Srpska can close shop and wave goodbye." Republika Srpska President, *Sputnik*, 27 February 2016.

[7] "The SNSD position is that Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions do not have the supremacy over Republika Srpska institutions and they should be used only to strengthen the Republika Srpska position." SNSD Vice-President Marko Vidakovic, *Narodne Novine*, 10 March 2016.

Court is the only domestic dispute resolution mechanism of its kind, as the international community implements its policy of local ownership.

Judicial referendum decision of the Republika Srpska National Assembly has apparently been put aside

27. I previously reported on the 15 July decision of the Republika Srpska National Assembly to hold a referendum in the Republika Srpska on the validity of the legislation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court and Prosecutor's Office, and the applicability of those institutions' decisions on the territory of that entity, as well as on the authorities and decisions of the High Representative. Such a referendum would constitute an open challenge to the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a violation of the commitments and obligations of the Republika Srpska arising under the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as set forth in annex 4 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace as well as under annex 10 of the Agreement. I welcome the fact that, so far, no major steps have been taken to implement the referendum decision of the Republika Srpska National Assembly, which at the time of writing had not been published in the Republika Srpska official gazette, while the President of the Republika Srpska and others have stated publicly that the referendum has been put aside. I note, however, that the decision has not been withdrawn.

Potential referendum on the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court decision

28. Although the Republika Srpska has not acted on the referendum on the Bosnia and Herzegovina judiciary, there have been threats to hold a separate referendum on the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court ruling of 26 November 2015, which determined that provisions of the Republika Srpska Law on Holidays, designating 9 January as the Day of the Republic are unconstitutional. All major Republika Srpska-based parties rejected the ruling, subjecting the three international judges serving on the court to sharp public criticism and calling for their removal from the court. On 29 November, the Serb-dominated parties in the Republika Srpska National Assembly adopted a joint statement demanding the drafting of a law on the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court entailing the proposal for a court without international judges. They also threatened non-cooperation of representatives of the Republika Srpska at the State level. The President of the Republika Srpska announced in December, March and April that a decision would be taken at a future session of the Republika Srpska National Assembly on the holding of a referendum to confirm 9 January as Republika Srpska Day. To date, no such decision has been taken and I continue to follow the issue closely. Under annex 4 of the General Framework Agreement, decisions of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court are final and binding.

Challenges to peace and security

29. During the reporting period, several incidents occurred which impacted on the overall political situation in the country.

Terrorist kills two soldiers in Sarajevo

30. I take this opportunity to commemorate the lives of Armin Salkić and Nedeljko Radić, two members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

who were shot and killed on 18 November in Rajlovac near Sarajevo, and to express my deepest gratitude for their service to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A Day of Mourning, to be observed on 20 November, was declared by the Council of Ministers. In addition, allow me to express my deepest condolences to the people of Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, the Russian Federation and Turkey affected by the recent terrorist attacks. Our respect for and memory of the victims will make us only stronger in defending the values of peace and tolerance. Barbarism and terror will not prevail.

Issue of foreign fighters

31. In April, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Court sentenced an individual to one year of imprisonment for terrorism and organization of a terrorist group. The sentence followed a guilty-plea agreement by which the perpetrator admitted that he had collected funds and left Bosnia and Herzegovina with the aim of joining Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), despite knowledge of the 30 May 2013 press release of the Security Council indicating that the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities had approved the listing of ISIL as a terrorist organization. Aware that there are other persons who had left Bosnia and Herzegovina to fight for such groups and subsequently returned to the country, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Prosecutor's Office continues to prosecute those involved.

Inter-ethnic incidents

32. Incidents continue to occur that threaten to undermine inter-ethnic relations. For example, the processions organized in March in Srebrenica and other municipalities by supporters of Vojislav Šešelj to celebrate his first-instance not-guilty verdict raised fear among Bosniak returnees within a community that is still trying to come to terms with the crimes of the past.

33. Two incidents in Mostar raised concerns that the already heightened tensions in the city due to the ongoing failure to implement the ruling of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court could escalate. First, a large Croat coat of arms was painted on the Planinica hill above Mostar on 26 March. The next day an incident occurred in Mostar's Old Town, where a stone engraved with the words "Don't forget" was removed from the Old Bridge, which is under the protection of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and thrown in the Neretva River.

III. State-level institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina

A. Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

34. The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to meet regularly during the reporting period, holding 11 sessions, as it sought to advance the country's efforts to join the European Union. The efforts of the Presidency culminated in the formal submission of an application for membership in the European Union in Brussels on 15 February. I have no doubt that, in time, this date will be seen as one of historic significance for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

35. Another important step was taken on 12 January, when the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina ratified the State Border Treaty between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the first border treaty ratified by Bosnia and Herzegovina with a neighbouring State. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliamentary Assembly had given its consent for the ratification of the Treaty on 10 December 2015.

36. The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to exercise its constitutional authority with regard to defence matters. On 2 December, amid announcements of the increase by neighbouring countries of their military capacities, the Presidency tasked the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations with monitoring and reporting regularly on the full implementation by all sides of obligations under the Agreement on Subregional Arms Control, in accordance with article IV of annex 1-B of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Presidency also adopted decisions on the destruction of defective ammunition and explosive ordnance stored in military facilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, extended the engagement of the armed forces in the international mission in Afghanistan, and requested approval by the Parliamentary Assembly of its decision on the participation of police officers of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

37. On 8 and 9 March, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina visited Croatia, where it held meetings with the President of Croatia and other senior officials. While talks focused on the provision of assistance by Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina in its efforts to join the European Union, they also touched on more contentious issues, including a border agreement between the two countries, property disputes, and Croatia's intention to construct a nuclear waste facility close to its border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. A joint session of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Government of Croatia was also announced.

38. Also, on a positive note, on 11 November, the Prime Minister of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, accompanied by two members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and senior Republika Srpska officials, visited Srebrenica for an investment conference, where Mr. Vučić stated that substantial funds had been allocated by Serbia for use in development projects in Srebrenica. The visit was conducted in a positive atmosphere and helped to repair the diplomatic damage caused by the incident that had occurred in Srebrenica on 11 July, when Mr. Vučić was assaulted with rocks and water bottles.

39. On 17 March, Bakir Izetbegović, a Bosnian member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, took over its rotating chairmanship from the outgoing chair, Dragan Čović, a Croat member of the Presidency.

B. Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina

40. The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to meet on a regular basis during the reporting period, holding 28 sessions. European Union-related and economic issues stemming from the Reform Agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the associated Action Plan continued to dominate the agenda throughout the period. Representatives of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of

Ministers attended the first meeting of the Stabilization and Association Agreement Council in Brussels on 11 December 2015.

41. The convening of the first joint session of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Government of Serbia on 4 November 2015 in Sarajevo was a noteworthy and positive development. The meeting focused on improving and intensifying cooperation and bilateral agreements in the fields of sustainable development, telecommunications, agriculture, environmental protection, trans-border cooperation, the Energy Community, infrastructure and social protection. Several protocols and agreements were signed, including a protocol on cooperation in the search for missing persons.

42. Despite the intensification of the rhythm of the sessions of the Council of Ministers, activity with respect to the adoption of legislative changes has been less impressive, with the Council of Ministers having adopted 8 new laws and amendments to 15 existing laws.

43. The Council of Ministers has adopted numerous other acts and decisions (entailing provision of information, reports and strategic documents) which aim at enabling an improvement of the economy, an increase in competiveness, and the advancement of economic and trade cooperation in the region. Improving foreign trade in the agricultural sector and protecting domestic products have also remained a priority. On 28 January, the Council of Ministers adopted a midterm workplan for 2016-2018, which focuses on macroeconomic stability, greater competitiveness and the reduction of poverty.

44. The Council of Ministers adopted an Integrated Border Management Strategy for 2015-2018, which represents another outcome under the Reform Agenda, as well as a revised Communications Strategy for 2016-2018. The Council of Ministers took a decision to improve the functionality of the armed forces, and steps to intensify the fight against terrorism and money laundering, and adopted a new Migration and Asylum Strategy.

45. The Council of Ministers made several important appointments to State agencies and administrative bodies, including a new Commission for Cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Joint Steering Board for Coordination of Implementation of United Nations Programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

C. Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina

46. Both Houses of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina convened regularly during the reporting period, with the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina holding nine sessions and the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina holding six sessions. Despite the regularity of the sessions, legislative output remains limited. Just three new laws and six amendments to existing legislation have been fully adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly since the beginning of its mandate. The Parliamentary Assembly also adopted an Audit Report for Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2014, and several special audits on impact analysis. The Parliamentary Assembly adopted numerous other reports and initiatives, and gave its consent to the ratification of international agreements. The Parliamentary Assembly also acknowledged the Council of

Minister's Action Plan for Implementation of the Reform Agenda on 2 March 2016. I hope this will facilitate an acceleration of legislative output in the period ahead.

47. Changes in the ruling coalition constitute one factor that has contributed to the slow pace of progress on legislation, with the Federation-based Democratic Front party being replaced by the Party for a Better Future. The two members of the Democratic Front in the Council of Ministers, as Minister of Communications and Traffic and Deputy Minister of Defence, were removed in December. However, their replacements have not been appointed owing to the levelling of criminal charges against the president of the Party for a Better Future and that party's candidate for one of those posts.

48. On 10 November 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina completed the appointment of the country's three Ombudsmen for Human Rights. Appointments to the General Auditors Office were completed on 22 March 2016. Given the nature of their responsibilities, the independence of both of these institutions remains of crucial importance and I urge the authorities to make every effort to ensure that it is maintained.

Amendments to the Election Law

49. Following the last general elections, an inter-agency working group was established under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina to propose amendments to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Election Law and the Law on Political Party Financing. The group agreed to several amendments in March, of both a technical and a substantive nature. While retaining a nominal open-list system, the proposed amendments would raise the threshold for candidates to move up party lists from 5 to 15 per cent for local elections and from 5 to 30 per cent for other levels (canton, entity, State). The group also proposed an increase in the number of signatures required in order for candidates to stand in elections. Gender representation quotas for candidate lists would remain at 40 per cent, but without existing requirements preventing, for example, parties from putting all female candidates at the bottom of the list. The working group was unable to make progress on several key issues recommended by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in its January 2015 report, such as reforms related to polling station committees, nor did the group tackle large political issues such as changes to the Election Law required in order to implement the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina on Mostar. In regard to party financing, the working group accepted roughly half of the recommendations made by the Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption. Under the law, any amendments that are to apply for the next local elections in October 2016 would need to be adopted and to enter into force by 4 May, when the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina is scheduled to officially announce those elections.

IV. Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Federation coalition developments

50. Following the departure of the Democratic Front from the coalition in the Federation, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Croatian Democratic Union

of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Party for a Better Future, the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH) and the Party of Democratic Activity (A-SDA) formed a new majority, appointing four new ministers to the government in October to replace the ministers who were members of DF. The arrest of the President of the Party for a Better Future, Fahrudin Radončić, in January on charges of obstruction of justice and influence peddling has shaken the coalition, although the Party for a Better Future and SDA met twice in February to publicly reaffirm their commitment to the coalition, which continues to function.

51. The Government of the Federation convened regularly during the reporting period, holding 41 sessions. Twenty-one new laws and amendments to 24 existing laws were adopted by the Government during the reporting period.

52. Both houses of the Parliament of the Federation have continued to convene regularly during the reporting period, with the House of Representatives of the Federation holding nine sessions. The House of Peoples of the Federation held 10 regular sessions in the same period. During this period, the Parliament of the Federation adopted 8 new laws and amendments to 14 existing laws.

Court ruling raises questions about quorums and decision-making in the House of Peoples

53. In November, the Vital Interest Panel of the Federation Constitutional Court rejected as inadmissible a vital national interest (VNI) request made by 10 delegates of the Serb caucus against amendments to the Federation Civil Service Law. The court's reasoning centred on the number of delegates required to initiate the VNI procedure, given the fact that only 13 delegates have been appointed to the Serb caucus in the House of Peoples, which should consist of 17 delegates, according to the Federation Constitution. Specifically, the court ruled that the two-thirds majority of the caucus required to initiate the procedure should be calculated based on the total number of delegates foreseen in the Federation Constitution (17) rather than on the actual number of sitting delegates (13). Based on this reasoning, a total of 10 delegates was not considered sufficient to meet the two-thirds threshold. The failure to appoint the full number of Serb members to the Federation House of Peoples has been a long-standing problem.

54. Opposition parties have claimed that the decision has more far-reaching consequences, which are not linked to the Civil Service Law, in that it establishes a new principle for calculating majority requirements for decision-making in the Federation House of Peoples. Those parties believe that, if applied, this principle could call into question many other recent decisions, including the appointment of the government and several legislative acts. Given these potential implications, I am following this issue closely. The same parties have also raised concerns regarding the current system for appointing Serb delegates, which consistently fails to ensure that all 17 Serb delegates are appointed to the House of Peoples. This is an issue that must be addressed and I stand ready to assist the authorities in finding a solution.

The Constitutional Court of the Federation declares unconstitutional the government decree on appointments to public companies

55. On 19 January, the Constitutional Court of the Federation ruled that the controversial June 2015 government decree on appointments to public companies was unconstitutional. The decree transferred authorities previously exercised by individual ministers to the government as a whole, which triggered the departure of the Democratic Front from the coalition.

Federation Labour Law is readopted

56. In February, the Constitutional Court of the Federation returned the already adopted Federation Labour Law to the proposal phase before the Federation House of Peoples, based on violations of the rules of procedure of the House and the Constitution in its adoption. The House readopted the law on 31 March.

Amendments to civil service legislation roll back previous reform

57. The Federation Parliament adopted amendments to the Federation Civil Service Law on 23 October under urgent procedure, which were widely perceived as a rollback of reforms previously undertaken to depoliticize the civil service. The amendments effectively convert a large number of previous civil service positions to direct political appointments.

Legal challenge to government work over a four-month period

58. On 25 February, the Vice-President of the Federation (Democratic Front) asked the Federation Constitutional Court to review the constitutionality of the work undertaken and the decisions taken by the Federation Government between 15 June and 28 October, that is, the period following the departure of one of the Bosniak ministers (Democratic Front) from the government and preceding his replacement. The President, who based his complaint on the Federation Constitution provision that the government must be composed of at least seven Bosniak ministers, alleged that during this period, the government included only six Bosniak ministers and had therefore worked unconstitutionally. He claimed that all decisions, appointments and other acts adopted during that period were also unconstitutional.

Mostar

59. Political party talks on the implementation of the 2010 ruling of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina intensified during the reporting period. The Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council convened on 2 December and again underscored that "Mostar must remain a single, coherent, multi-ethnic unit of local self-government, with some level of local authority/ administration below that of the city".

60. Discussions of HDZ Bosnia and Herzegovina and SDA went on behind closed doors throughout the reporting period; and in March, it appeared as if an agreement could be imminent, possibly as part of a wider package which would address the Sejdić-Finci ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. In April, a meeting between the leaders of HDZ Bosnia and Herzegovina and SDA related to the Mostar issue failed to yield positive results. I have continued to press those parties and other political actors to achieve a breakthrough and I stand ready to assist them.

61. Sensing that SDA and HDZ Bosnia and Herzegovina may be reaching a consensus on dividing the city along ethnic lines, other political actors including the Social Democratic Party (SDP), DF, Naša Stranka, the Croat Republican Party and a former mayor of Mostar have come forward to promote their own proposals on how to implement the ruling of the Constitutional Court. Mostar's Serb community has also engaged in efforts to find a solution, with the assistance of the Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The SDA proposal, which was eventually leaked, was widely perceived as a model for the ethnic partition of Mostar, resulting in a strong public backlash. HDZ Bosnia and Herzegovina promptly made it clear that it would not support the division of the city and, instead, would submit its own proposal under Bosnia and Herzegovina parliamentary procedure.

V. Republika Srpska

62. During the reporting period, the ruling coalition in the Republika Srpska remained stable, with the Republika Srpska government holding 28 regular sessions. The Republika Srpska National Assembly, which held nine sessions, adopted 12 new laws and amendments to 17 existing laws.

63. While the ruling coalition remained stable, relations between the two major parties in the coalition, SNSD and the Democratic National Alliance (DNS), have become strained as DNS publicly criticized actions of the government and relations within the coalition. With local elections foreseen in October 2016, relations between the ruling and the opposition block have remained tense.

Non-cooperation with the High Representative

64. It is regrettable that the reporting period has seen a continuation of attacks upon the Office of the High Representative and on the High Representative in particular. On 9 January, I began receiving several thousand postcards, under the sponsorship of SNSD, which called for me, as High Representative, to "go home". A number of the postcards included death threats. The postcards were handed over to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Prosecutor's Office, who will determine whether they constitute grounds for prosecution. I am concerned that similar postcards were also sent to the international judges on the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court.

65. The Republika Srpska authorities have continued their policy of denying the High Representative access to official information and documents required to fulfil his mandate. Under annex 10 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace, all authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina are obliged to fully cooperate with the High Representative as well as with international organizations and agencies, as provided for under article IX of the General Framework Agreement. The practice engaged in

by the Republika Srpska government of not providing the information and documents requested by the Office of the High Representative goes back to 2007. Repeated calls by the Peace Implementation Council reminding the government of its obligation to ensure that the High Representative has full access to documents in a timely fashion have had no impact. This policy contradicts the frequent claim made by the Republika Srpska that the entity respects the letter of the General Framework Agreement for Peace.

VI. International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

Former President of the Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić, convicted of genocide in first instance

66. On 24 March, the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia rendered its first-instance verdict in the case against Radovan Karadžić, the wartime President of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska and the supreme commander of its armed forces. The International Tribunal found Karadžić guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war as committed by Serb forces during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Karadžić was sentenced to 40 years of imprisonment. The International Tribunal found that Karadžić had committed those crimes through his participation in four joint criminal enterprises. A common plan to permanently remove Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from the Bosnian Serb-claimed territory through the commission of crimes in municipalities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina constituted the overarching joint criminal enterprise, which was engaged in between October 1991 and November 1995.

Serbian Radical Party leader Vojislav Šešeelj found not guilty in first instance

67. On 31 March, the International Tribunal found Vojislav Šešelj not guilty in first instance on all counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes. The prosecution, which had asked for a sentence of 28 years, has said that it will appeal the decision. Reactions to the verdict have been divided. The President of the Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, praised Šešelj for his resilience and called the case groundless and politically motivated. The response among Sarajevo-based parties and commentators, as in Croatia, was generally one of shock and outrage. Following the decision, there were reports of a number of troubling incidents in which supporters of Šešelj insulted and threatened Bosniak returnee communities in the Republika Srpska during celebrations over the verdict. Harking back to what had occurred during the 1992-1995 war Šešelj supporters drove their cars, in column formation, through the streets of Srebrenica and Bratunac, while waving the flag of Šešelj's Serbian Radical Party and shouting out threats to kill Bosniaks. Similar gatherings of supporters were reported in Bijeljina and Trebinje.

VII. Entrenching the rule of Law

68. Discussions within the European Union-led Structured Dialogue on Justice continued during the reporting period and concentrated on new draft legislation on

the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There seems to be an emerging agreement that the provision regulating the criminal jurisdiction of the Court should be redrafted in order to "objectivize" the criteria under which the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina currently exercises criminal jurisdiction over prosecution of crimes prescribed by the entity codes. I have made it clear that the State-level jurisdiction may not be diminished, as it follows the division of competencies between the State and the entities under the Constitution. In addition, an agreement appears to have been reached to create an additional Bosnia and Herzegovina Appellate Court by transforming the current Appellate Panel of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a new institution.

69. I continue to be concerned by the tendency of political actors to put pressure on the judiciary in ongoing proceedings, not least by delivering strongly worded pronouncements in public. It remains vitally important that the members of the judiciary be free from political pressure when they prosecute and rule on cases, which should be in a manner that is fully aligned with the principles of professionalism and accountability. Similarly, all those under indictment must be regarded as innocent until such time as they are proved guilty.

Anti-corruption efforts

70. The implementation of the Federation legislation of 2014, whose purpose is to create a special prosecutor's department for fighting corruption and organized crime, continues to be delayed owing to a lack of allocated budgetary resources. In February 2016, the Government of the Federation proposed the amendment of the legislation, with a view to officially postponing the date of its application until 1 July 2017. At the moment, there are no guarantees that the administrative prerequisites for the legislation to become operative can be met even by that date. In parallel with this, legal uncertainty remains in regard to the jurisdiction over the prosecution of corruption and organized crime in the Federation.

Prosecution of domestic war crimes

71. The deadline set for the strategic goal of processing all serious war crimes cases within seven years expired in December 2015. Since that goal was not achieved, the Supervisory Board for the Implementation of the War Crimes Prosecution Strategy initiated a discussion on identifying the reasons for non-achievement and revising the plans. The Board should also be in a position to assess whether funds provided by the European Union for processing of cases of war crimes are being properly disbursed by the authorities.

VIII. Public security and law enforcement, including intelligence reform

72. The practice of political interference in operational policing remains a challenge, as attested by the continued delays in the appointment of police directors and the independent boards that select them and later monitor their performance. The issue of the appointment of the Federation Administration Police Director is still unresolved owing to an ongoing court dispute over the validity of an already

conducted selection process. The appointments of new police commissioners in West Herzegovina Canton and Canton 10 are still outstanding. The appointments of independent boards have been delayed in Posavina, Tuzla and West Herzegovina cantons. At the State level, an initiative to remove the entire Independent Board, in a murky legal situation, threatens to create the perception of improper political influence exerted over the work of this professional oversight body.

73. On 29 December, the Sarajevo Cantonal Assembly adopted a new Law on Internal Affairs. The Una-Sana Cantonal Assembly adopted a new Law on Internal Affairs in first reading on 25 January 2016. On 27 October 2015, the Federation House of Representatives adopted new legislation on police officials in first reading.

74. The new Republika Srpska Law on Police and Internal Affairs was adopted by the Republika Srpska National Assembly at the end of December 2015. However, disputes arose when the President of the Republika Srpska refused to accept amendments on proportional representation of constituent peoples and so-called "others", in line with the 1991 census of the Republika Srpska police, as agreed with the Bosniak caucus in the Republika Srpska Council of Peoples and as provided under the Republika Srpska constitution. In a procedural manoeuvre, the Republika Srpska National Assembly rejected the Law in early March 2016 to allow for the preparation of a new version. On 7 April, the Republika Srpska National Assembly adopted the new version, deleting reference to the 1991 census. The adopted version of the law refers to the "last census" (conducted in 2013), which could have the effect of greatly reducing the obligation of the Republika Srpska to employ minority police, if the obligation under the new version is compared with the obligation arising from the 1991 census.

75. The Office of the High Representative continues to monitor changes made to police legislation and encourage harmonization in jurisdictions throughout the country.

Appointment of the new Director of the State Investigation and Protection Agency

76. On 5 November 2015, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina appointed Perica Stanić as the new Director of the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) for a four-year term, following a selection process conducted by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Independent Board, after the dismissal of Goran Zubac from the post on 5 August 2015.

Appointment of a new Director General of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Intelligence and Security Agency

77. On 19 November 2015, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina appointed Osman Mehmedagić to the post of Director General of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Intelligence and Security Agency.

IX. Economy

78. While 2015 was generally assessed as a positive year in terms of the economic recovery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the relevant institutions of the country observed a downward trend in respect of industrial production and foreign trade in the first months of 2016. While it had increased by 2.6 per cent in 2015, industrial production in January 2016 fell by 3.3 per cent, as compared with the figure for the same month in 2015. Similarly, Bosnia and Herzegovina had registered a 3.5 per cent increase in exports and a 2.1 per cent decrease in imports in 2015, while exports and imports fell by 1.2 per cent and 2.4 per cent, respectively, in the first two months of 2016. The deflation level of 1 per cent registered in 2015 was also characteristic of the beginning of 2016. A positive trend continued in terms of the collection of indirect tax revenue, which is essential for fiscal stability at all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Indirect Taxation Authority again registered a record collection level in 2015 (BAM 6.357 billion, representing 1.9 per cent increase over 2014), while the collection in the first two months of 2016 increased by 1.3 per cent over the same period in 2015.

79. The credit rating of Bosnia and Herzegovina was affirmed by both Moody's Investors Service on 26 February ("B3 with stable outlook") and Standard & Poor's Ratings Services on 11 March ("B with stable outlook"). The World Bank report entitled *Doing Business 2016: Measuring Regulatory Quality and Efficiency* (Washington, D.C., 2016) ranked Bosnia and Herzegovina as seventy-ninth among 189 economies in terms of the ease of doing business, which represents significant progress compared with its one hundred seventh place in the 2015 ranking. Particularly good ratings were assigned in the categories of getting credit (forty-second place), trading across borders (twenty-eighth place) and resolving insolvency (thirty-eighth place).

80. In January, the average monthly net salary in Bosnia and Herzegovina amounted to BAM 829 and the average pension amounted to BAM 358, representing a 0.2 per cent increase in both cases compared with the figures for the same month in 2015. Substantial deficits in pension funds led the Republika Srpska to include its fund within the Republika Srpska Treasury System to ensure regular monthly pension payments, and the Federation plans to do the same. The rise in the number of pensioners continues to outpace the number of contributors in both entities, and a low rate of collection of contributions also exacerbates financial problems.

81. Unemployment fell 2.2 per cent in January compared with January 2015, with the administrative unemployment rate at 43.2 per cent (actual unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina is estimated at about 27.7 per cent). The share of youth unemployment in the total unemployment figure is about 60 per cent. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in the first nine months of 2015 amounted to BAM 388.9 million, a 33.8 per cent, decrease compared with the figure for the same period in 2014.

82. The banking sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is assessed as generally stable, but there are concerns regarding the stability of certain banks in the Republika Srpska. The 2015 bankruptcy of Bobar Banka affected a number of public institutions, companies and individuals. SIPA, acting upon a request of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Prosecutor's Office, arrested a number of persons in connection with the bank's collapse, including the Republika Srpska Banking Agency Director and the Republika Srpska Investment-Development Bank Director. Banka Srpske

has also had difficulties, resulting in the appointment by the Republika Srpska Banking Agency of a provisional administrator in November. A third Republika-Srpska-based bank, Pavlović Banka, is also in a difficult position, owing mainly to the domino effect exerted by the two previous cases.

Fiscal issues

83. The overall fiscal situation was somewhat better in 2015, thanks mainly to a continued increase in indirect tax revenue collection and reduced foreign debt payment obligations. Fiscal challenges in 2016 may arise from the 26 per cent increase in foreign debt payment obligations and further delays in international financial assistance. Negotiations on a new IMF programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina were initiated but had not been concluded at the time of this writing.

84. A challenge to the fiscal stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina has also arisen from increasing public debt. At the end of 2015, the total public debt of Bosnia and Herzegovina amounted to BAM 11.936 billion, a 3.6 per cent increase over 2014. The share of foreign debt in this amount was BAM 8.401 billion, a 2.2 per cent increase over the share in 2014, while the share of internal debt in total public debt was BAM 3.535 billion, a 7.1 per cent increase over the share in 2014. The total public debt has increased by 26.2 per cent compared with the figure for only five years ago. The increase of foreign debt over that period is estimated at 34 per cent and the increase of internal debt has been 10.4 per cent.

85. Most public budgets for 2016 were adopted before the end of 2015. The budget for Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions and international obligations for 2016 has amounted to BAM 1.720 billion, of which BAM 950 million is for financing State institutions and BAM 770.6 million is for foreign debt servicing. While the financing of the State institutions will remain at the same level as that for the last four years, foreign debt servicing in 2016 will increase by 2 per cent over 2015.

86. The 2016 Federation Budget amounts to BAM 2.598 billion, an increase of 11 per cent compared with 2015. It projects domestic revenues of BAM 1.886 billion (a 1.3 per cent increase). The coverage of a deficit of BAM 712 million is planned through foreign long-term borrowing (BAM 312 million) and domestic short-term and long-term borrowing (BAM 360 million and BAM 40 million, respectively). The total planned borrowing represents 27 per cent of the total expected revenue for 2016. Debt payments of BAM 974.9 million are foreseen (a 14 per cent increase).

87. All 10 cantons have adopted their 2016 budgets. The overall fiscal situation in the cantons improved in 2015, owing mostly to the performance of indirect tax revenue, but accumulated deficits continue to burden most of the cantons. In Una-Sana and West Herzegovina cantons, those deficits are almost equal to the cantons' respective annual budgets. A serious challenge not only for some cantons but also for municipalities and cities emerged following the decision of the Federation Minister of Finance to use the 2013 preliminary census results as the basis for the allocation of revenue to the cantons and other lower levels of government. The Minister's instruction triggered dissatisfaction in some cantons with Bosniak majorities. The affected cantons demanded the annulment of the instruction, claiming that preliminary census results could not be used, and warned of the levelling of criminal charges against the Minister. Moreover, SDA announced

that there would be an appeal to the Constitutional Court of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina should the instruction not be repealed.

88. The fiscal crisis facing the City of Sarajevo, due to the city's exclusion from the system of revenue allocation in the amended Federation Law on Allocation of Public Revenues in May 2014, was resolved with the assistance of my Office. In acknowledgement of that assistance, Sarajevo conferred the "Key of Sarajevo" award on the High Representative. A sound legal basis for ensuring the allocation of revenues to the city was established when the Federation Parliament adopted necessary amendments to the Federation Law on Allocation of Public Revenues on 19 November.

89. The 2016 Republika Srpska budget in the amount of BAM 3.1 billion was adopted by the Republika Srpska National Assembly. The main reason for the adoption of such a large budget has been the inclusion of the Republika Srpska Pension and Disability Insurance Fund in the Republika Srpska Budget Treasury System. The budget projects total domestic revenue of BAM 1.689 billion (a 5 per cent increase). The coverage of a deficit of BAM 558.3 million is planned through long-term borrowing (BAM 459.4 million) and domestic short-term borrowing (BAM 98.8 million). The total planned borrowing represents 24.8 per cent of the total expected revenue for 2016. Debt payments of BAM 670 million are foreseen (a 31 per cent increase).

90. The conclusion of a new financial arrangement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and IMF would ease fiscal pressures in both entities, particularly in the Republika Srpska, which is already faced with serious liquidity problems, as evidenced by delays in the monthly budget payments of the Republika Srpska.

International obligations

91. On 16 October, the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community adopted measures against Bosnia and Herzegovina for persistent breaches of obligations arising from the Energy Community Treaty, in particular in relation to the gas sector. Despite the efforts undertaken during the reporting period by the country's Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations to coordinate domestic stakeholders, no tangible progress has been made to ensure compliance with the Treaty, mainly because of the continued differences of opinion of the two entities with regard to the extent of State-level regulation. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to demonstrate progress by the date of the next meeting of the Energy Community Ministerial Council, to be held in October, as the basis for successfully arguing against the continued imposition of measures.

X. Return of refugees and displaced persons

92. Upholding the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their pre-war homes remains central to the full implementation of annex 7 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace, which requires authorities at all levels "to create in their territories the political, economic, and social conditions conducive to the voluntary return and harmonious reintegration of refugees and displaced persons, without preference for any particular group (article II)".

93. An environment that is conducive to sustainable return is equally important and requires the full implementation of the 2012 Return Strategy. In this respect, I remain particularly concerned by the ongoing difficulties faced by returnees in the education sector in several local communities, not least in relation to the use and names of official languages. It is for this reason that I have pressed the Republika Srpska authorities to ensure that all three official languages (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian) are used equally in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

XI. Media developments

94. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) continued to face challenges, including funding difficulties. The existing system of tax collection through the three main telecom operators lapsed in December, and was extended for another six months while a permanent arrangement is sought. The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina instructed the country's Ministry of Communications and Transport to establish a working group to examine possible collection models.

95. The failure to establish a PBS corporation (to serve the three public broadcasting services (BHRT, RTRS and FTV)) continues to hold back overall PBS reform as well as the changeover from analog to digital broadcasting. The draft proposal of the General Managers of BHRT, RTRS and FTV in March 2016 on entering into a consortium agreement rather than establishing the corporation points to the long-running refusal to implement the existing PBS Law.

96. The reporting period has also seen attempts to change the PBS Law. Amendments put forward in March by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Traffic and Communications proposed three channels within BHRT, with programming adjusted to meet the needs of a single constituent people, broadcast accordingly from studios in Sarajevo (in the Bosnian language), Banja Luka (in Serbian) and Mostar (in Croatian). This proposal has yet to be voted on, but has already been publicly rejected by the two existing entity public broadcasters (RTRS and FTV).

97. I am also concerned by amendments to the RTRS Law adopted by the Republika Srpska National Assembly in first reading in February. Contrary to the provisions of existing State-level legislation, the amendments provide RTRS with a possibility for broadcasting on more than one channel on its own frequencies.

98. On 3 December 2015, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina appointed an interim General Director of the Communications Regulatory Agency, which regulates the electronic media in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The process leading to the appointment of a new General Director by the Council of Ministers is entering its final phase.

XII. Defence matters

99. The Ammunition, Weapons and Explosives (AWE) Strategic Commission, led by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Defence, continues to meet periodically to coordinate efforts to dispose of Bosnia and Herzegovina's stockpiles of ammunition, weapons and explosives. At 2,000 tons, the pace of disposal has almost doubled in the last year. Further progress is needed, as ageing stockpiles and poor storage

conditions mean the risk of accidental explosion remain. An agreement to establish a mechanism through which surplus stockpiles could be sold remains out of reach.

100. Regrettably, Bosnia and Herzegovina will not meet its goal of becoming landmine-free by 1 March 2019. A new target date has yet to be agreed. On a more positive note, the Board of Donors on Mine Action has been reinvigorated and is now engaged with the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities in ensuring improvement and greater scrutiny of mine clearance efforts.

XIII. European Union military force

101. The European Union military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to play an important role in supporting the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to maintain a safe and secure environment. That support in turn assists my Office and other international organizations in fulfilling their mandates. The presence of the European Union military force on the ground, including through its liaison and observation teams, remains an important contribution to stability and security.

XIV. Future of the Office of the High Representative

102. The political directors of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council met in Sarajevo on 1 and 2 December 2015 to underline not only the progress that has been made in implementing the General Framework Agreement for Peace, but also their unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Steering Board also reinforced the need to complete the 5+2 agenda, which remains necessary for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. The next meeting of the Steering Board is scheduled to be held on 7 and 8 June 2016.

103. Since the beginning of my mandate in March 2009, the budget of the Office of the High Representative has been reduced by over 45 per cent and my staff by over 51 per cent. Given these deep cuts, it remains essential that I be equipped with the budget and staff required to carry out my mandate effectively, as I am entitled to do under annex 10 of the General Framework Agreement for Peace.

XV. Reporting schedule

104. In keeping with the proposals of my predecessor to submit regular reports for onward transmission to the Security Council, as required under Council resolution 1031 (1995), I herewith present my fifteenth regular report. Should the Secretary-General or any Council member require information at any other time, I would be pleased to provide an additional written update. The next regular report to the Secretary-General is scheduled for October 2016.

launched a petition to "impeach the three presidencies", stating that the revised list did not deliver on the demands of the people.

4. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the inter-party political stalemate continued, preventing the functioning of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. In addition to fighting ISIL, the region also faces serious humanitarian, economic and fiscal challenges, compounded by the continuing differences over oil exports and revenue-sharing with the federal Government.

B. Political situation

5. On 20 February 2016, the Prime Minister sought the support of the Council of Representatives to initiate his plan for a "technocratic" cabinet, which legislators endorsed on the condition that the new ministers continue to implement the national political agreement and reforms. The leader of Ahrar Trend, Muqtada al-Sadr, expressed strong support for the restructuring of the Government and instructed his supporters to bolster public demonstrations in support of the reforms. He released his own reform plan on 13 February and set a 45-day deadline for the Prime Minister to conclude the process. The decision of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to refrain from publicly issuing pro-reform calls was followed by a more prominent role by al-Sadr in the pro-reform and anti-corruption movement.

6. Although all political blocs expressed their nominal support for the restructuring of the cabinet, they continued to disagree on a number of aspects and called on the Prime Minister to hold broad consultations to ensure political consensus. The National Alliance coalition held several meetings to resolve internal disagreements over the restructuring. Contrary to the Ahrar Trend, the State of Law and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq indicated their preference for a partial ministerial restructuring to be determined by the Prime Minister on the basis of an assessment of each minister's performance, without excluding the option of a complete change of government. On 2 March, the Kurdistan Alliance and the Iraqi Forces Coalition called upon the Prime Minister to ensure that the principles of inclusive partnership and balance among the main components, upon which the Government of national unity had been formed, would be maintained in the restructuring.

7. On 9 March, the Prime Minister's Office invited political blocs to each submit the names of two candidates for ministerial positions by 16 March. The letter of the Prime Minister was accompanied by a 105-page reform paper outlining the restructuring mechanism, notably that a committee of nonpartisan experts would receive and evaluate the credentials of the candidates for ministerial posts on the basis of criteria of professionalism and accountability, as well as a commitment to implement the national political agreement and reforms. The committee then recommend the most qualified candidates to the Prime Minister, who would then select the candidates and present them to the Council of Representatives for endorsement. On 17 March, the Iraqi Forces Coalition, the Kurdistan Alliance and the Wataniya Alliance issued statements expressing their concern about the openness of the process. Expressing its dissatisfaction for not being consulted on the selection process, the Iraqi Forces Coalition also announced that it would not nominate candidates for ministerial posts. In response to these concerns, the Prime

Minister issued a statement on 17 March reaffirming his commitment to consult more broadly with his political partners on the restructuring.

8. In separate statements between 16 and 19 March, the Council of Ministers, the three presidencies and the political blocs affirmed the right to peaceful demonstrations. They announced the formation of a committee representing all blocs, which would work with the Prime Minister on the restructuring and would directly negotiate with the demonstrators. The committee would also work to expedite reforms, bring all weapons and fighters under firm State control and counter corruption, in line with the demands of the demonstrators.

9. On 26 February, approximately 200,000 Iraqis staged a peaceful pro-reform and anti-corruption rally in Baghdad's Tahrir Square in response to a call by Muqtada al-Sadr for such protests. The protests were held until the end of the 45-day deadline he had given to the Prime Minister to form a new cabinet. On 12 March, Muqtada al-Sadr called for peaceful sit-ins at the entrance to the Green Zone in Baghdad in support of the pro-reform movement, which commenced on 18 March. Al-Sadr escalated the pressure when he entered the Green Zone for a personal sit-in on 27 March. Following the Prime Minister's statement on 31 March proposing a reduction of ministries from 21 to 18 and announcing a list of technocrats to restructure the Government, al-Sadr called off all protests around the Green Zone.

10. Further steps were taken towards the prosecution of officials accused of corruption and the recovery of State funds. On 18 February, the Commission of Public Integrity referred to the judiciary former Deputy Prime Ministers Bahaa al-Araji and Saleh al-Mutlaq; Farouk al-Araji, director of the military office of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki; and Naim Abo'ab, the former Mayor of Baghdad, on charges that they had exploited their positions to illegally accumulate wealth. On 20 February, the Council of Representatives, in coordination with relevant ministries and oversight bodies, formed a committee to follow up on the recovery of Iraqi funds smuggled abroad. In reaction to international press reports claiming that senior Iraqi officials had been involved in corruption related to oil contracts during the previous governments, the Prime Minister ordered an immediate investigation.

11. During the reporting period, the three presidencies continued their efforts to advance national and community reconciliation in Iraq. On 31 January, the President of Iraq, Fuad Masum, met with the Endowment and Religious Affairs Committee of the Council of Representatives to discuss the role of religious figures and civil society in promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence through community reconciliation. On 27 February, the parliamentary Speaker, Salim al-Jubouri, presented a road map to achieve national reconciliation at a workshop on community reconciliation and social cohesion supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Prime Minister al-Abadi also attended the meeting. However, a number of challenges continued to hinder the reconciliation efforts, including the continued lack of trust and absence of political consensus, and the lack of a unified vision and framework for national reconciliation.

12. Political blocs held regular discussions in the Council of Representatives on priority legislation to promote reconciliation. On 14 March, the Ministry of Defence approved a draft law for compulsory military service to ensure inclusiveness in

Iraq's security institutions. However, the justice and accountability act, the banning of the Baath Party act, the Federal Court act and the national guard law remained stalled in Parliament.

13. During the reporting period, Iraq's economic and fiscal situation continued to be severely impacted by the decrease in global oil prices, wasteful and ineffective economic practices and corruption. These made it a challenge to finance the war against ISIL, address the humanitarian needs of the internally displaced and others and undertake reconstruction and rehabilitation activities. In February 2016, Iraq's oil revenues dropped despite export levels reaching the third-highest daily average of any month on record. In March, however, a partial recovery in world oil prices led to an increase in Iraq's oil revenue. On 20 March, Iraq also made its first ever shipments of natural gas out of Basra's Umm Qasr port.

14. The Kurdistan Regional Government released financial data in March indicating a monthly deficit of $370 million for operational costs.

15. With the severe economic and fiscal crisis affecting Baghdad and Erbil, and ongoing protests in different cities, the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government reengaged in discussion of outstanding issues. A delegation led by the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, visited Baghdad on 31 January and 8 April, where it met with the President and the Prime Minister of Iraq to discuss the joint fight against ISIL, economic issues and the reform process. Separately, the Prime Minister of Iraq met with the President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Masoud Barzani, in Munich, Germany, in February. On 11 March, the Oil Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, announced that Baghdad had ordered a cessation of oil exports pumped from Kirkuk to Ceyhan, Turkey. On 24 March, the Mr. Abdul-Mahdistated publicly that he had halted his presence at the ministry and cancelled all of his activities until a decision was made on his previously submitted resignation letter. He stated that his resignation was intended to provide the Prime Minister with the necessary space for his planned Government restructuring.

16. On 26 January, the President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq chaired a meeting of political parties in Erbil amid the political stalemate that had kept the Kurdistan Regional Parliament in recess since 23 October 2015. During the meeting, an inter-party committee was formed, comprised of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Islamic Union, to resolve the political crisis, including through dialogue with Gorran and the Kurdistan Islamic Group, who had boycotted the meeting. On 3 February, in an inter-party committee meeting, in which Gorran and the Kurdistan Islamic Group also participated, Gorran listed the reinstatement of its Speaker of Parliament and four ministers, as well as reforms to address the financial crisis and to counter corruption, as conditions for its reactivated participation in Parliament. On 2 March, the heads of political lists in the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, including Gorran, held their first meeting in six months. All parties called for the political and financial crisis to be resolved as quickly as possible but did not reach any concrete agreement.

17. On 3 February, President Barzani reiterated his message that the time was appropriate for the people of the Kurdistan region of Iraq to decide on their future through a referendum. He added that such a referendum would not immediately lead to a declaration of statehood.

C. Security

18. The security situation in Iraq remained highly volatile during the reporting period. Militarily, pro-Government forces continued to register further successes in fighting ISIL. Operations focused on expanding control over parts of Anbar governorate and consolidating areas recently retaken from ISIL, specifically in central Ramadi. Preparations to retake areas remaining under ISIL control, including Mosul, continued. Government control over areas freed from ISIL in Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates was also consolidated. Although proceeding more slowly than expected, efforts were undertaken by Iraqi military and civilian experts, with international support, to accelerate clearance of improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance in Ramadi, essential for ensuring the safe return of internally displaced persons. Iraqi security forces, the popular mobilization forces, tribal fighters and Peshmerga continued to make steady progress in pushing ISIL back with support from the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL and other partners.

19. On 20 February, the Prime Minister announced in the Council of Representatives that the popular mobilization forces would be included in military operations to retake Mosul. On 29 February, in response to the Prime Minister's announcement, the Ninewa Provincial Council voted to reject the inclusion of the popular mobilization forces, noting allegations of poor conduct in other retaken areas. After intensive discussions among political blocs, the President of Iraq confirmed on 17 March that all forces would participate in the Mosul liberation campaign, but neither the popular mobilization forces nor the Peshmerga would enter the city once ISIL was expelled.

20. The security situation in areas freed from ISIL continues to be challenging owing to terrorist, sectarian, intercommunal and criminal violence. On 29 February, in Muqdadiya, Diyala governorate, a suicide attack, for which ISIL claimed responsibility, took place at a Shiite funeral ceremony, killing 19 civilians and wounding 33. Fifteen members of the popular mobilization forces were also killed and 10 wounded. On 1 and 9 March, the Speaker of Parliament and other Iraqi Forces Coalition leaders expressed grave concern that reported reprisal attacks against the Sunni community had taken place in Muqdadiya for the second time in a year, following terrorist attacks on the community, and called for urgent measures to bring all fighters and weapons under the firm control of the State. For his part, the Chair of the Iraqi Forces Coalition in the Council of Representatives, Ahmed al-Msari, issued calls for increased international guarantees and monitoring of the security situation in Diyala.

21. On 25 March, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive belt at a football match in Iskandariya, Babil governorate, reportedly killing 29 people and wounding 50 others. On 29 March, a suicide belt attack targeted a group of workers in Tayaran Square in central Baghdad, reportedly killing 10 people and wounding 31. ISIL claimed responsibility for both attacks.

22. Baghdad continued to see the highest rate of attacks targeting civilians in the country, for which ISIL claimed responsibility. During the reporting period, Baghdad witnessed 301 incidents targeting civilians and 78 incidents targeting the Iraqi security forces. Among the deadliest incidents was a 28 February suicide attack in Sadr City, which killed at least 24 civilians and wounded 62. Unidentified

bodies continued to be found on a near daily basis in Baghdad city and its outlying areas.

D. Regional and international developments

23. During the reporting period, the Government of Iraq continued its international and regional engagement to strengthen its bilateral and multilateral relations and to secure political, military and economic support for humanitarian and reconstruction needs and in the fight against ISIL. Discussions also began with international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, on fiscal support after economic and fiscal reforms are introduced by Baghdad and Erbil.

24. High-level delegations from the Government of Iraq conducted bilateral visits to Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Italy to seek military assistance and support for reconstruction and to strengthen economic cooperation. During a visit to Cairo from 7 to 10 March, the President of Iraq announced that he had discussed with the President of Egypt prospects for military support to professionalize the Iraqi army.

25. On 8 March, in an effort to secure a new oil export route to boost Iraq's revenues, the Oil Minister of Iraq met with the Prime Minister of Egypt and the Energy Minister of Jordan in Cairo. After the meeting, the Petroleum Minister of Egypt announced that the three ministers had agreed on an oil pipeline project from Basra, Iraq, to Aqaba, Jordan. In February, the Oil Minister of Iraq also met with his counterparts from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Venezuela to discuss measures to address declining oil prices.

26. In mid-February, the Prime Minister of Iraq attended the annual Munich Security Conference in Germany, where he pledged to fully uproot ISIL from Iraq in 2016. World leaders present at the Conference pledged ongoing military and other support to Iraq. The Minister of the Interior of Iraq attended the 33rd session of the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior, held in Tunis on 2 and 3 March. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Ministers released the "Tunis Declaration", in which they condemned all acts of terrorism, including those directed against ethnic minorities, and called for efforts by Arab States to tackle the financing of terrorism in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions. On 11 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, participated in the extraordinary session of the Council of the Arab League, where member States condemned all forms of terrorism and its financing. Meanwhile, the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, visiting Iraq on 26 and 27 March, reaffirmed his organization's support for Iraq as well as its readiness to facilitate a national unity convention to be called "Mecca II", in the format of the Mecca Conference held in 2006. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq conveyed his Government's support for such a conference.

27. The Global Coalition to Counter ISIL pledged ongoing support for Iraq at a meeting on 2 February in Rome attended by my Special Representative and the Deputy Special Representative and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. The ministers for foreign affairs of the Small Group of the Global Coalition praised the work of the UNDP Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization and called for additional contributions to the fund, to the United Nations humanitarian appeal for

Iraq and for demining, which was critically needed to enable stabilization, rehabilitation and the return of internally displaced persons. The Small Group also pledged to continue supporting the training of the Iraqi police forces to hold and stabilize areas recaptured from ISIL. At a subsequent meeting in Brussels on 11 February, defence ministers of the Global Coalition further reaffirmed their commitment to accelerate and intensify counter-ISIL efforts.

28. On 14 March, the Speaker of Parliament of Iraq visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where he met with the King, the Deputy Crown Prince, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Speaker of Parliament. The interlocutors discussed means of promoting bilateral and regional relations and strengthening their joint efforts in the fight against ISIL and in confronting terrorism. They also highlighted the need for both countries to build strong ties to confront the challenges facing the region.

29. Relations between Iraq and a number of Gulf Cooperation Council members, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, were tested during the reporting period on account of those countries' public statements about the conduct and legality of the popular mobilization forces.

30. Iraq and Turkey did not manage to find a mutually acceptable solution to the Turkish military presence in Bashiqa camp, in northern Iraq. On 4 February, on the margins of a donor conference in support of the Syrian Arab Republic and the region in London, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq met with the Prime Minister of Turkey to discuss a possible solution that would fully respect the sovereignty of Iraq. My Special Representative also visited Ankara on 8 February, where he met with representatives of the Government of Turkey.

31. Meanwhile, Turkish air strikes against Kurdistan Workers Party targets in the Kurdistan region of Iraq continued during the reporting period, concentrated in remote villages of Amedi and Zakho districts in Dohuk governorate, as well as other locations in Erbil governorate.

32. Iraq, together with its international partners, took important steps to call for accountability for the crimes that ISIL has perpetrated against the people of Iraq. While in Rome on 10 February, the Prime Minister of Iraq met with Pope Francis to discuss the crimes committed by ISIL against Christians living in Iraq. On 14 March, the United States Congress adopted a resolution acknowledging that the crimes of ISIL constituted international crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. On 17 March, the Secretary of State of the United States asserted that in his judgement, ISIL was responsible for "genocide against groups in areas under its control, including Yezidis, Christians and Shia Muslims" and for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. He affirmed that the United States would strongly support efforts to collect, document, preserve and analyse the evidence of atrocities and would do all it could to see that the perpetrators were held accountable.

III. Update on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the United Nations Country Team

A. Political activities

33. On 26 March, I paid a visit to Iraq, together with the President of the World Bank Group, Jim Yong Kim, and the President of the Islamic Development Bank, Ahmad Mohamed Ali, and had discussions with the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and other high-level officials. I congratulated the people of Iraq on steady victories against ISIL and lauded the heroism and sacrifices of the Iraqi security forces, the popular mobilization forces, the Peshmerga and the tribal forces. I stressed the importance of an inclusive political process that would weaken support for ISIL and reinforce Iraq's unity. I encouraged the Prime Minister to continue efforts to overcome political polarization and divisions and to work on strengthening the partnership between Baghdad and Erbil. I welcomed the Prime Minister's reform agenda and confirmed the support of the United Nations for it. The President of the World Bank Group, the President of the Islamic Development Bank and I pledged the support of the international community to address Iraq's humanitarian needs and fiscal difficulties. In Erbil, we met with the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Throughout the visit, we highlighted the paramount importance of comprehensive economic reforms and increased transparency.

34. On 7 February, my Special Representative facilitated a meeting of representatives of the Group of Seven countries in Baghdad, as well as the representatives of the European Union and the World Bank, with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance of Iraq, to discuss the fiscal and economic difficulties facing Iraq and possible reforms to overcome them. A meeting with the same objective was facilitated on 7 March with the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil. These efforts received positive responses from Iraqi leaders and some leaders of the Kurdistan region of Iraq as an opportunity for the international community to better understand the depth of the crisis and the reforms planned or implemented by the authorities.

35. The United Nations marked Interfaith Harmony Week from 2 to 10 February with a number of UNAMI-organized events in Najaf, Baghdad and Erbil aimed at promoting coexistence, cohesion and forgiveness, and reconciliation at all social levels. The events were attended by a wide range of stakeholders, including parliamentarians, international community representatives, religious and cultural leaders, civil society representatives and youth groups. The discussions emphasized the importance of inclusive dialogue as well as the need for durable solutions to help internally displaced persons in the country, and education and awareness programmes to steer youth away from extremist ideologies. They further underlined the need for the Government to make progress on improving intercommunal relations and to swiftly restore State and local authority, rule of law, good governance, justice and services to liberated areas.

36. UNAMI continued its efforts to promote women's rights in Iraq in support of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). With support from UNAMI, civil society representatives, including members of the 1325 Alliance and the Iraqi Women's Network, continued to press for women's inclusion in national

reconciliation efforts, as well as wider national political processes. On 7 March, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in partnership with the Women's Parliamentary Committee, organized a high-level event at the Council of Representatives marking International Women's Day.

37. In Baghdad, on 12 March, a conference titled "The establishment of the Civil Peace and Social Coexistence Network" was jointly organized by the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation of the Prime Minister's Office and UNAMI. The conference brought together over 100 representatives from civil society organizations to discuss how to promote their active engagement in political and community reconciliation and in combating ethno-sectarian and area-based segregation, as well as in advancing national reconciliation and social peace.

38. My Special Representative undertook several visits to the Kurdistan region of Iraq to encourage cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad. In addition, he continued to encourage Kurdish political parties to break the ongoing political deadlock in the region through inclusive political dialogue.

B. Electoral assistance

39. During the reporting period, UNAMI continued supporting the Independent High Electoral Commission. My Special Representative convened a meeting on 3 March of the diplomatic community and the Chairperson and Chief Electoral Officer of the Commission. In the meeting, project proposals developed with support from UNAMI were presented for international funding consideration. UNAMI continued providing technical advice to the Commission in the planning of the 2017 Provincial Council elections, including in the development of a concept of operations and a timeline. UNAMI also continued supporting the Commission in developing an institutional gender policy and related training. UNAMI is further providing expertise to the Commission on new procedures for election results management, as well as ongoing assistance in the establishment of the newly created Political Entities Directorate. On 3 April, the Independent High Electoral Commission commenced biometric registration for internally displaced voters in 11 governorates.

40. UNAMI continued to engage the Council of Representatives regarding parliamentary oversight of electoral processes. On 18 February, UNAMI met with the Legal Committee of the Council to consider proposed amendments to the electoral law for provincial, district and subdistrict councils, and the process for selecting the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission. The terms of the current commissioners expire in 2017. UNAMI also sought the views of the Committee on the memorandum of understanding between the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission, under consideration by the Council of Representatives.

C. Human rights developments and activities

41. Iraqis continue to be affected by armed conflict, acts of violence and terrorism. From 27 January to 31 March 2016, UNAMI recorded a minimum of 3,418 civilian

casualties (1,039 killed and 2,379 wounded), bringing the total number of civilian casualties since the upsurge of violence and armed conflict in the country that commenced in January 2014 to at least 62,656 (21,272 killed and 41,384 wounded).

42. During the reporting period, there was a rise in asymmetric and terrorist attacks, many claimed by ISIL, resulting in high numbers of civilian casualties. A five-day period beginning on 25 February saw particularly high levels of violence after two suicide bombers attacked a Shiite mosque in Baghdad, killing eight civilians and wounding 18. On 28 February, also in Baghdad, two suicide bombers targeted a market in a Shia-majority area, killing at least 24 civilians and wounding 62. On 6 March, a suicide attack on the main checkpoint entrance to Hilla city, Babil governorate, killed 31 civilians and 10 police officers. On 25 March, a terrorist bombing at a football ground in Babil governorate killed and injured many civilians.

43. Women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly, as well as members of ethnic and religious communities, continue to be particularly vulnerable to serious abuses and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Numerous reports of such violations, particularly by ISIL, continued to be received by UNAMI. At least 1,500 women and children, mostly from the Yezidi community but also from other ethnic and religious communities, remain in captivity by ISIL, and I continue to have grave fears for their safety.

44. UNAMI continued to receive reports of abductions, killings and persecution by ISIL of those opposed to its ideology or rule. On 1 February, in Mosul, Ninewa governorate, ISIL abducted three café owners for alleged breaches of their "code of conduct" and, on 6 February, amputated the hands of three teenagers accused of theft. ISIL killed at least seven civilians accused of cooperating with the Iraqi security forces by drowning them on 13 February. On 22 February, ISIL publicly murdered four men southwest of Kirkuk following accusations that they had cooperated with the Iraqi security forces.

45. Reports of worsening living conditions in ISIL-controlled areas persist, as well as of civilians continuing to be killed by ISIL for trying to flee. On 29 February, ISIL killed and subsequently hanged from a pylon a man in Mosul district, and reportedly murdered, on 6 March, three young men for attempting to flee Hawija district, in Kirkuk governorate.

46. During the reporting period, it was reported that ISIL used weaponized chemical agents. On 11 February, ISIL mortar attacks against the Peshmerga south of Sinjar district, Ninewa governorate, reportedly resulted in at least nine officers suffering suffocation, dizziness and sore eyes. ISIL attacks on Peshmerga positions on 17 February in Makhmur district, on 25 February in Sinjar district and on 2 March in Tal-Afar district (all in Ninewa), resulted in Peshmerga and civilians suffering from similar ailments. On 8 March, a rocket attack in Tazah district, Kirkuk governorate, caused breathing difficulties for a number of people who were subsequently admitted to hospital. A three-year-old girl and a nine-year-old girl died from complications believed to stem from the effects of that attack. UNAMI could not verify that weaponized chemical agents were used, and these reports have not been officially substantiated. In a letter dated 20 March 2016 (S/2016/267, annex), the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq informed the Security Council of the incident in Tazah and noted that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons had been notified of the incident.

47. Mass graves continued to be discovered in Iraq, including one containing an undetermined number of bodies in central Ramadi, Anbar governorate, on 23 January. The victims had reportedly been killed by ISIL in May 2015 when it took over the city. On 16 February, it was reported that a mass grave containing the remains of approximately 40 individuals was discovered in eastern Ramadi, where security officials also reported the discovery on 2 March of a grave containing the bodies of seven police officers. Gathering evidence is challenging according to Government officials, who state they lack the resources and expertise to adequately protect or excavate these sites.

48. Reports continued to be received by UNAMI about human rights violations perpetrated by armed groups reportedly associated with the popular mobilization forces. On 1 March, members of such groups killed a civilian, wounded several civilians and destroyed three houses in different areas of Muqdadiya, Diyala governorate. On the same day, they reportedly abducted seven civilians from the Sunni Arab community in Muqdadiya and Baquba. UNAMI also received reports alleging the same groups' involvement in preventing the return of internally displaced persons to the retaken Balad district of Salah al-Din governorate. Tensions triggered by the distribution of compensation to victims and families of victims of previous ISIL and Al-Qaida attacks had initially flared on 7 February. Sources reported that between 7 and 9 February, a number of homes belonging to displaced persons, as well as businesses, were destroyed by explosives planted by unidentified local members of such groups to prevent the return of their owners to Balad district.

49. Air strikes and shelling continued to cause civilian casualties, including a 4 February air strike alleged to have caused an undetermined number of casualties in Hit, Anbar governorate. On 8 and 9 February, shelling, reportedly by ISIL, caused civilian casualties in Amiriyat al-Fallujah, Anbar governorate. On 15 February, an air strike reportedly killed five civilians in Shirqat district, Salah al-Din governorate. On 18 February, air strikes reportedly caused civilian casualties in Rutba and Hit, Anbar. On 7 March, an air strike in Hit reportedly killed five civilians. Challenges in information verification hampered the confirmation of the number of casualties and the determination of responsibility for such incidents.

50. During the reporting period, 57 incidents of grave violations against children were reported to the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, co-chaired by UNAMI and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Of these, killing and maiming continued to be the most frequently reported violations, with 83 children confirmed killed and 90 maimed. Owing to a lack of access and security restrictions, cases of recruitment and use of children by ISIL could not be verified. The Task Force also received information on five attacks on schools, mainly in Baghdad and Diyala. Meanwhile, military operations in conflict-affected areas continued to severely hamper children's access to education and health.

51. On 18 February, the Central Criminal Court in Baghdad sentenced 40 to death for involvement in the June 2014 Camp Speicher events. The trial, known as Speicher Three, was monitored by UNAMI and fell short of international fair trial standards, including in the lack of an effective defence for the accused and failure to investigate allegations of torture. The sentences have been referred to the Court of Cassation on appeal as required by Iraqi law.

52. The Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues visited Iraq from 27 February to 7 March. She held meetings with the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Prime Minister

of the Kurdistan region of Iraq in Baghdad and Erbil; consulted numerous leaders from Iraq's ethnic and religious communities; and visited displacement camps in Dohuk governorate. Following her visit, the Special Rapporteur stressed the need for additional assistance and support for Iraqis displaced by conflict, as well as the need to acknowledge and tackle longstanding societal discrimination and marginalization of ethnic and religious groups.

D. Camp New Iraq and Camp Hurriya

53. The United Nations continued to monitor the humanitarian situation of the residents of Camp Hurriya. To date, 1,898 residents remain in the camp and 1,173 have relocated to third countries. During the reporting period, 55 residents relocated from Iraq. On 24, 25 and 26 February, a group of family members of the residents visited the Camp's police station to meet relatives residing in the camp. The residents, however, refused to meet the visitors and expressed their objection to such visits. My Special Adviser for the Relocation of Camp Hurriya residents Outside of Iraq continues to lead efforts, together with relevant stakeholders, to relocate the remaining residents.

E. Humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development

54. The number of people in Iraq requiring humanitarian assistance has doubled in the past year. At least 10 million Iraqis require some form of assistance, including 3.3 million internally displaced persons, about 550,000 returnees and nearly 250,000 Syrian refugees. Depending on the intensity of military operations, the United Nations estimates that another 2 to 3 million civilians may be in need by the end of 2016 and forced to seek assistance from the Government, religious foundations and humanitarian organizations. Hundreds of thousands of people are likely to remain trapped in besieged areas in desperate need of assistance, with little or no opportunity to exit. Thousands of families are already caught between the front lines of opposing forces and many more are likely to become so in the coming months. Over 3 million people are estimated to live under ISIL control and are in need of assistance.

55. The security situation remains the single most important factor affecting humanitarian assistance and protection. Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk governorates, as well as southern Erbil, continue to be affected by active hostilities. Insecurity is also prevalent in Baghdad and Diyala, and continues to limit delivery of humanitarian assistance. Civilians fleeing violence are often victimized by parties to the conflict, held at checkpoints and prevented from entering safe areas and moving freely within certain camps, including the Nazrawa and Garmawa camps in Kirkuk and Ninewa governorates.

56. More than 55,000 people have been displaced in Anbar since military operations increased at the end of December 2015. Most of the newly displaced have arrived at overcrowded camps and temporary settlements in and around the Amiriyat al-Fallujah displacement complex, Habbaniyah tourist city and the Bzeibiz bridge. Additional displacement has occurred as a consequence of ongoing military operations west of Ramadi in Anbar governorate and in Makhmour district in Erbil governorate, where approximately 30,000 new internally displaced persons have

been settled in temporary camps and are being assisted. Military operations have also triggered new displacement of over 22,000 people around Samarra in Salah al-Din governorate. Humanitarian partners have scaled up the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, health and food assistance in response to the increasing needs.

57. Conditions in ISIL-controlled Fallujah are deeply worrying. For two years, regular clashes and aerial bombardment have caused widespread destruction, injury and death, while humanitarian access has been extremely limited. Although the United Nations is unable to access Fallujah city, information from local sources during the reporting period confirms that conditions are deteriorating rapidly. The majority of markets and shops in Fallujah are closed. The prices of basic commodities increased by over 800 per cent during the reporting period and staples such as rice are unavailable. The main power station is not functioning and the public water supply is limited to one day per week. There are indications of widespread shortages of medicine and credible reports of deaths. In late March, the Government informed the Humanitarian Coordinator that it intends to open safe corridors to allow civilians to exit the city.

58. In Ninewa governorate, 36 Sunni Arab families have been stranded between Peshmerga and ISIL front lines since mid-November 2015, with only intermittent access to humanitarian support. A local organization was able to access and assist the families with a 20-day supply of food and household items in February. Advocacy efforts are under way to ensure that families can cross into safer areas. In the light of continued military operations, a mechanism to ensure dignified, open and safe screening of people trying to leave conflict areas for safer territories is required.

59. The humanitarian operation in Iraq remains one of the most complex and largest in the region. More than 180 partners continue to provide life-saving assistance and protection, reaching more than 2.5 million people each month. UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP), in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Organization for Migration and nine non-governmental organizations, provided life-saving assistance through the rapid response mechanism to more than 150,000 newly displaced people in hard-to-reach areas in Anbar, Salah al-Din and Erbil governorates. Protection monitoring teams of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reached hundreds of thousands of at-risk women and girls, and child protection partners provided sustained psychosocial support to over 4,000 newly registered children. More than 1,500 cases of children with severe emotional distress and disabilities were referred for specialized services. UNFPA also provided reproductive health supplies to hundreds of hospitals and primary health-care and maternity units.

60. During the reporting period, more than 1.6 million displaced people and 46,700 refugees received monthly food assistance from WFP and its partners. FAO distributed fertilizer to vulnerable rural families in Ninewa governorate. WHO and health partners are reaching hundreds of thousands of at-risk Iraqis in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Diyala and Salah al-Din governorates with basic health services and specialized referral services, and vaccinated 5.4 million children under five years of age against polio in all Iraq. With support from humanitarian agencies, led by UNICEF, millions of people now have

temporary and sustainable access to safe water and sanitation facilities in areas of displacement.

61. Education partners ensured that thousands of children benefited from learning materials and hundreds of teachers were trained in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and in Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Diyala and Salah al-Din governorates. In cooperation with the ministries of education of the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan region, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization provided access to secondary education to 1,099 Syrian refugees and 5,009 internally displaced students in camps and host communities through two projects funded by the Government of Japan. To meet winterization needs, humanitarian partners provided more than 378,000 displaced people and 68,000 refugees with household items and fuel.

62. Conditions in retaken areas are highly variable and it will take months to create conditions that allow for safe, voluntary and dignified returns to most retaken towns. To date, approximately 550,000 people have returned to areas retaken in Anbar, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates. Returns in many areas, including Ramadi and Sinjar, have been delayed by extensive contamination with explosive devices and the massive destruction of civilian infrastructure. The United Nations Mine Action Service continued to provide strategic guidance to the Government of Iraq through the national operations centre, the Directorate of Mine Action and the Iraqi Kurdish Mine Action Authority, supporting the deployment of emergency operations and capacity-building activities.

63. Through the Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization, and with the support of 18 international donors, UNDP continued to work under Government leadership to stabilize newly liberated areas. In November 2015, the Funding Facility Steering Committee, co-chaired by my Deputy Special Representative for Development and Humanitarian Support and the Government of Iraq, extended its work to nine liberated cities in Diyala, Ninewa and Anbar governorates. During the reporting period, nearly all of the populations in Al-Dour and Mkeishiefa, in Salah al-Din governorate, returned to their homes, supported by the Funding Facility, which helped to create a corridor of stability between them and Tikrit. In anticipation of the completion of explosive clearance activities in Ramadi, UNDP pre-positioned vital equipment, including mobile grids and generators, for dispatch as soon as areas are declared safe. In late March, the scope of the Funding Facility was expanded to four more retaken areas and a second funding channel for expanded stabilization was established. The new channel will focus on high-impact medium-scale projects to generate large numbers of jobs, encourage mass returns and consolidate corridors between stabilized cities and districts.

64. UNDP and UNFPA continued to help survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. UNFPA mobile support teams reached hundreds of victims, including women and girls fleeing ISIL, while UNDP-supported legal aid centres in Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk governorates provided free legal and psychosocial services to thousands of survivors from refugee and displaced populations. UNDP also continued to work with non-governmental organizations to raise awareness and provide training on sexual and gender-based violence case management, referrals and policing.

65. Since its completion in 1984, the Mosul dam has stored water from the Tigris River, generated electricity and reduced the risk of seasonal flooding. Unfortunately,

repairs essential to the dam's structural integrity were interrupted when ISIL occupied the facility and destroyed equipment. Although the dam is now under Government control, onsite and downstream sensors indicate that its diaphragm is under severe stress and the risk of a catastrophic outburst is real and increasing. Collapse of the dam would directly affect at least one third of the country's population. Efforts to prevent a collapse of the dam are under way. In February 2016, the Prime Minister approved a contract for an Italian engineering company to start maintenance work on the dam.

66. The United Nations is working with Iraqi authorities to prepare for the potential collapse of the dam. UNDP, with funding from the United States Agency for International Development, is helping the Government to set up and test an emergency alert and communication system to mobilize civil defence in the event of a breach. In March, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs deployed an expert on technological disasters from its joint unit with UNEP to help the Government establish protocols to activate international support in case of need. The collapse of the Mosul dam would also have a significant impact on United Nations operations in Iraq, including the safety and security of personnel and their dependants.

F. Security and operational issues

67. The process of articulating a 2016-2017 integrated strategic framework for the United Nations in Iraq will soon be completed. The framework will provide a common strategic vision to underpin the political, human rights and developmental objectives of UNAMI and the United Nations country team on the basis of an updated situational analysis.

68. United Nations personnel in Iraq continue to operate in a volatile security environment under challenging circumstances, and the United Nations security management system has had to implement extensive security management measures in order to mitigate prevalent threats. This reality was starkly highlighted when, on 15 February, the murder of UNAMI staff member Amer al-Kaissy was verified, following his abduction in Baquba, Diyala, on 26 April 2015 by unidentified gunmen.

69. The reporting period saw significant demonstrations in many parts of Iraq, including in close proximity to UNAMI compounds in Baghdad. The United Nations security management system continued to work with Government security agencies to mitigate the risk to staff safety and security posed by such events. Meanwhile, the United Nations is following up with the Legal Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a view to concluding the status of mission agreement.

70. The limited availability of safe and secure accommodation in Baghdad for international United Nations staff continues to hamper the Organization's ability to implement its mandate and programmatic activities. In addition to the existing 185 accommodation units in the D-2 compound, 99 more units are in the pipeline; 10 units are likely to be completed by April 2016, 10 by September 2016 and the remaining 79 by the end of June 2017. The country team and UNAMI continue to require additional accommodation to conduct their programmes and operations countrywide.

IV. Observations

71. I extend my compliments to the Iraqi security forces, Peshmerga, popular mobilization forces and tribal volunteers on their steady victories against ISIL. I hope that this positive momentum will continue until the violence and hatred promoted by ISIL are eradicated.

72. It remains clear, however, that military operations alone will not eliminate the threat of terrorism in Iraq. Iraqi political leaders must overcome their mistrust and divisions and reach consensus on a single vision for reconciliation. They need to intensify their efforts to reach a compromise that would enable the passage of key legislation.

73. I welcome the continued efforts of the Prime Minister to pursue much-needed reforms in Iraq. I urge the Prime Minister to consult broadly throughout this process, ensuring also inclusive representation, particularly of women and all of Iraq's diverse components. It is important that the Government and all political actors continue to listen to the legitimate demands of the Iraqi public for meaningful and genuine reforms, protect their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and ensure their safety in the exercise of these rights.

74. Governmental restructuring is the first step to open the way for deeper reforms, particularly economic and institutional reforms that will improve the standard of living for all Iraqis. These reforms should include ongoing efforts to increase transparency and counter corruption; devolve centralized functions to local authorities to improve service delivery; implement pragmatic economic measures that will help to restructure public financial management, revenue collection and management of public assets; and diversify the economy and attract investments. I urge all of Iraq's political parties to fully support the Prime Minister in his efforts to implement the reforms that are urgently needed and requested by the Iraqi people. I reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to support these efforts through guidance and technical assistance.

75. The serious challenges that Iraq faces also require cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil in the spirit of genuine partnership. It is imperative that both sides remain committed to reaching an understanding on oil exports and revenue-sharing, Peshmerga salaries and other outstanding issues. I exhort the political parties in the Kurdistan region of Iraq to resolve the current political stalemate through inclusive dialogue on the basis of democratic and legal principles.

76. Activities that will ensure sustainable peace among communities after military victories against ISIL remain vital to securing Iraq's long-term stability. I urge the Government to continue to prioritize the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the displaced to their places of origin in areas recovered from ISIL. The widespread contamination of Ramadi by improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war is of great concern. The scope of such contamination far exceeds national clearance capacities. International capacities need to be urgently mobilized and funded.

77. I also remain deeply concerned by continued reports of reprisal attacks against communities trying to rebuild their lives in areas liberated from ISIL, including in the areas of the disputed internal boundaries. I reiterate my call upon the

Government of Iraq to bring all fighters and weapons under its firm control and to hold to account those who violate the law.

78. I condemn in the strongest possible terms the continued killings, kidnappings, rape and torture of Iraqis by ISIL, which may constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and even genocide. I equally strongly condemn the continued suicide attacks by ISIL on public places, as well as places of worship, which kill civilians, including children. These attacks have the clear aim of stoking sectarian tensions in Iraq. Iraqis must refrain from resorting to violence and reprisal attacks, as these undermine the unity of Iraq and its people, and only work in favour of terrorism.

79. I am concerned by the reports that have emerged of the use of weaponized chemicals by ISIL in its attacks on civilians and security force personnel. I condemn any attempt by ISIL to use chemical agents as weapons, the use of which is prohibited and considered a violation under international law. I call upon the international community to support the Government of Iraq in its efforts to investigate these reports, offer appropriate care to those affected and ensure the accountability of anyone found to be involved in the use of weaponized chemicals against civilians or security force personnel.

80. I also call upon the international community to take steps to ensure the accountability of members of ISIL for the atrocious crimes they have perpetrated against the Iraqi people and to take steps to recognize the gravity of ISIL crimes. I furthermore urge the Government of Iraq to take urgent steps to address past crimes and violations by granting Iraqi courts appropriate jurisdiction over international crimes committed in Iraq, and to ensure that the perpetrators are tried in full compliance with due process and fair trial standards required by international law and the Constitution of Iraq.

81. I condemn in the strongest terms the killing of UNAMI staff member Amer al-Kaissy, following his abduction by unidentified gunmen in April 2015. It is the responsibility of the Iraqi authorities to conduct a thorough and open investigation and to bring the perpetrators to justice swiftly. I reiterate my call upon the authorities to do so.

82. The humanitarian crisis in Iraq continues to be a source of great concern. Additional resources are urgently needed. The United Nations and its partners have requested $861 million for 2016 to provide emergency relief to 7.3 million vulnerable Iraqis. Only 15 per cent, or $128 million, has been received so far. Urgently mobilizing additional funds, including for assistance in areas retaken from ISIL, remains one of my highest priorities.

83. Lastly, I wish to extend my appreciation to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, and all of the staff of the United Nations in Iraq for their continued efforts in assisting the Government and people of Iraq. I trust that Iraq's international partners, including its neighbours, will continue to extend their support to my Special Representative in the implementation of his mandate.

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Letter dated 25 April 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to draw your attention to a report entitled *Strengthening the Rule of Law through the United Nations Security Council*. The report, authored by Jeremy Farrall and Hilary Charlesworth (both of the Australian National University), together with Alan Ryan (Australian Civil-Military Centre), is the result of an independent study of the Security Council's approach to the rule of law. It is acknowledged therein that the Council has taken important steps to strengthen the rule of law. At the same time, it is underscored that more work needs to be done.

To that end, the report contains 66 forward-looking recommendations developed in consultation with Governments, Secretariat staff, non-governmental organizations and other academics. Not all the recommendations are endorsed by the Government of Australia, but Australia supports the idea at the heart of the project, which is that the Security Council must both promote and respect the rule of law.

The report is available from https://securitycouncilanalysisnetwork.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/arc-linkage_rol-policy-proposals.pdf.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Gillian **Bird**

United Nations A/70/849–S/2016/398

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
28 April 2016

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventieth session
Agenda items 35 and 40

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

Identical letters dated 27 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Further to the letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov, dated 20 April 2016, on the recent escalation of the situation at the line of contact of the armed forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the border between the two States, I would like to draw your attention to the latest gross violation by the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia of the ceasefire agreement of 5 April 2016, reached in Moscow between the Chiefs of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, with the assistance of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

The armed forces of Armenia, while concentrating additional forces and military equipment at the line of contact, starting from 23 April 2016, fired intensively on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan and the civilian settlements near the confrontation line using large-calibre weapons, mortars, grenade launchers and heavy artillery. It should be noted that there are inhabited Azerbaijani villages only on Azerbaijan-controlled territories, as all other settlements on Armenian-controlled land have been totally ethnically cleansed by the Armenian armed forces. On 24 April at midnight, a house belonging to a resident of the Shikharkh settlement in the Tartar district of Azerbaijan was destroyed as a result of artillery shelling by the armed forces of Armenia (see photographs in annex I). On that night, the units of the armed forces of Armenia fired intensively on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan from the tanks concentrated along the confrontation line, and attempted to attack with additional manpower.

Please recycle

The latest offensive actions of the armed forces of Armenia undermine the recent ceasefire agreement of 5 April 2016 and seriously challenge the diplomatic efforts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group aimed at resolution of the conflict.

In this respect, we reiterate our appeal to the international community to condemn Armenia for blatant violation of international law and the ceasefire regime, demand strict compliance by it with the 5 April 2016 ceasefire commitments and that it engage constructively in substantive talks on the withdrawal of its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan that would thus pave the way for further consideration and solution of remaining political issues.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annexes[1] circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 35 and 40, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Husniyya **Mammadova**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

[1] Annex II is being circulated in the language of submission only.

Annex I to the letter dated 27 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Information from the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The armed forces of the Republic of Armenia have again grossly violated the ceasefire agreement of 5 April 2016 reached between the Chiefs of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia.

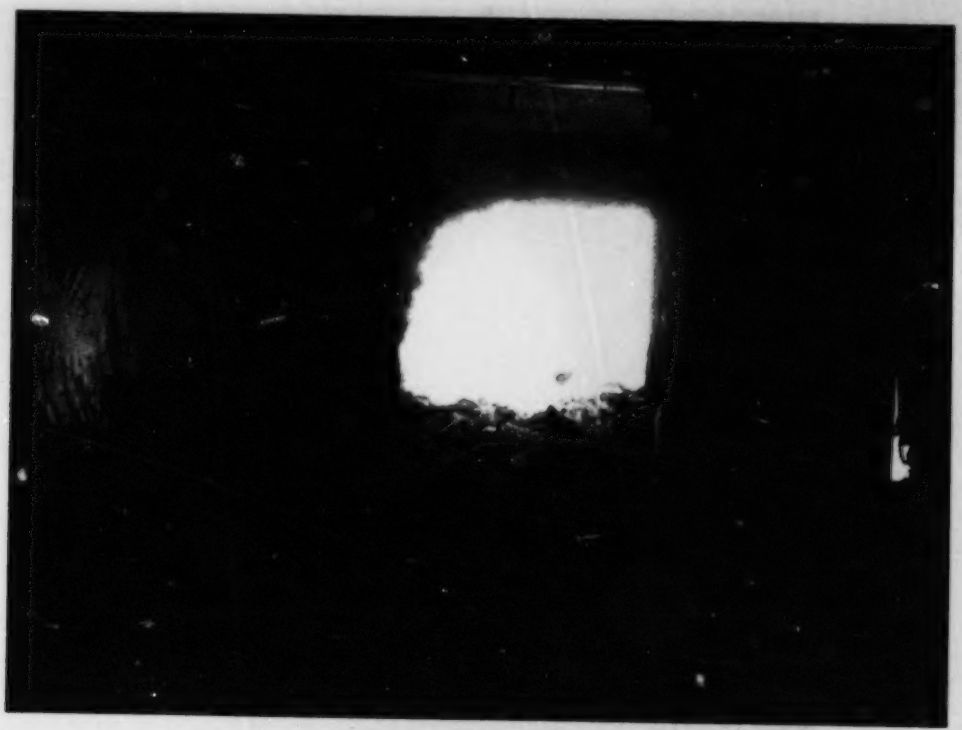
Units of the armed forces of Armenia, while concentrating additional forces and military equipment in the direction of Aghdere, starting from 23 April 2016, fired intensively on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan and the civilian settlements in the Tartar district near the confrontation line using large-calibre weapons, mortars, grenade launchers and heavy artillery.

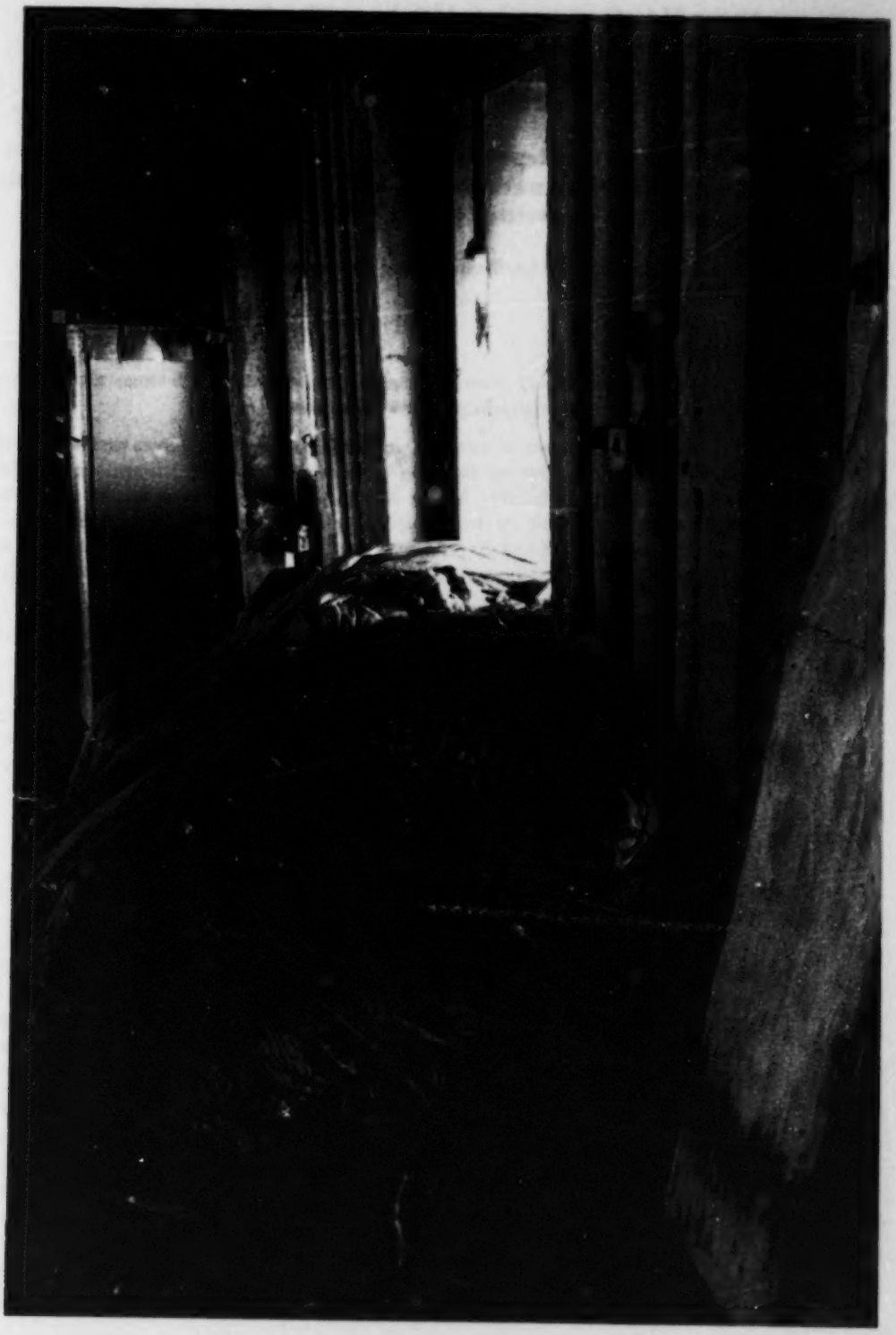
The armed forces of Armenia, using 122-mm D-30 howitzers, fired up to 20 projectiles on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan. On 24 April at midnight, the house belonging to a resident of the Shikharkh settlement in the Tartar district was destroyed (see photographs below) as a result of artillery shelling by the armed forces of Armenia.

The units of the armed forces of Azerbaijan took immediate countermeasure actions in that direction, in order to prevent the hostile activities by the armed forces of Armenia. At midnight on 24 April, the units of the armed forces of Armenia fired intensively on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan from the tanks concentrated along the confrontation line, and attempted to attack with additional manpower.

Tanks belonging to the armed forces of Armenia, while approaching the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan, were stopped by fire and one of them was destroyed, with its crew. After this action Armenian units were forced to retreat in the direction of Aghdere. Armenian artillery units located around the Sugovushan (Madagiz) military base were also suppressed by preventive measures.

House belonging to a resident of the Shikharkh settlement in the Tartar district, destroyed as a result of artillery shelling by the armed forces of Armenia





Annex II to the letter dated 27 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Violations by the Republic of Armenia of the ceasefire agreement of 5 April 2016 between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan committed from 19 to 24 April

Update to the list of 20 April containing the violations committed from 5 to 19 April*

20 April 2016

The armed forces of Armenia violated the ceasefire 120 times along various directions of the front, also using large-calibre machine guns.

From their positions in nameless heights located in the Ijevan district, Dovekh village in the Noyemberyan district, Chinari and Aygepar villages in the Berd district and nameless heights in the Krasnoselsk district of Armenia, the armed forces of Armenia fired on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan in nameless heights and Kamarli village in the Gazakh district, nameless heights and Aghbulag village in the Tovuz district and nameless heights in the Gadabay district.

The positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan were also subjected to fire from positions in nameless heights near Chileburt and Yarimja villages in the Tartar district; Shikhlar, Javahirli, Sarijali, Kangarli, Novruzlu, Marzili, Shuraabad, Garagashli, Yusifjanli and Namirli villages in the Aghdam district; Kuropatkino village in the Khojavand district; Garakhanbayli, Horadiz, Gorgan and Ashaghi Seyidahmadli villages in the Fuzuli district; and Mehdili village in the Jabrayil district, as well as in heights in Goygol, Goranboy, Khojavand, Fizuli and Jabrayil districts.

21 April 2016

The armed forces of Armenia violated the ceasefire 143 times along various directions of the front, also using 60-mm mortars.

From their positions in Berkaber and Parakavar villages in the Ijevan district, Mosesgekh, Chinari and Aygepar villages in the Berd district and nameless heights in the Krasnoselsk district of Armenia, the armed forces of Armenia fired on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan in Gizilhajili village in the Gazakh district; Kohnagishlag village in the Aghstafa district; Aghdam, Alibayli and Koxanabi villages in the Tovuz district and nameless heights in the Gadabay district.

The positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan were also subjected to fire from positions in heights near Chileburt, Goyarkh and Yarimja villages in the Tartar district; Shikhlar, Bash Garvand, Javahirli, Sarijali, Kangarli, Marzili, Garagashli and Yusifjanli villages in the Aghdam district; Kuropatkino village in the Khojavand

* See A/70/838, annex.

district; Garakhanbayli, Horadiz, Gorgan, Ashaghi Seyidahmadli villages in the Fuzuli district; and Mehdili village in the Jabrayil district, as well as in nameless heights in the Goygol, Goranboy, Khojavand, Fizuli and Jabrayil districts.

22 April 2016

The armed forces of Armenia violated the ceasefire 110 times along various directions of the front, also using large-calibre machine guns and 60-mm mortars.

From their positions in Parakavar and Berkaber villages in the Ijevan district, Dovekh and Barekamavan villages in the Noyemberyan district, Aygepar and Mosesgekh villages in the Berd district and nameless heights in the Krasnoselsk district of Armenia, the armed forces of Armenia fired on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan in nameless heights and Gizilhajili, Kamarli and Gaymagli villages in the Gazakh district; Alibayli and Aghdam villages in the Tovuz district and nameless heights in the Gadabay district.

The positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan were also subjected to fire from positions in heights near Chileburt, Yarimja and Goyarkh villages in the Tartar district; Shikhlar, Javahirli, Sarijali, Kangarli, Novruzlu, Shuraabad, Garagashli, Marzili and Yusifjanli villages in the Aghdam district; Kuropatkino village in the Khojavand district; Garakhanbayli, Horadiz, Gorgan and Ashaghi Seyidahmadli villages in the Fuzuli district; and Mehdili village in the Jabrayil district, as well as in nameless heights in the Goygol, Goranboy, Khojavand, Fizuli and Jabrayil districts.

23 April 2016

The armed forces of Armenia violated the ceasefire 108 times along various directions of the front using large-calibre machine guns, mortars, grenade launchers and artillery systems of 60, 82 and 120 mm, as well as battle tanks.

From their positions in nameless heights, as well as Parakavar and Berkaber villages in the Ijevan district, Dovekh village in the Noyemberyan district, Mosesgekh, Chinari and Aygepar villages in the Berd district and nameless heights in the Krasnoselsk district of Armenia, the armed forces of Armenia fired on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan in Kohnagishlag village in the Aghstafa district; nameless heights and Gizilhajili and Kamarli villages in the Gazakh district; nameless heights and Aghdam, Alibayli and Aghbulag villages in the Tovuz district and nameless heights in the Gadabay district.

The positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan were also subjected to fire from positions in heights near Chileburt and Yarimja villages in the Tartar district; Shikhlar, Bash Garvand, Kangarli, Novruzlu, Marzili, Garagashli, Yusifjanli and Namirli villages in the Aghdam district; Kuropatkino village in the Khojavand district; Garakhanbayli, Horadiz, Gorgan and Ashaghi Seyidahmadli villages in the Fuzuli district; and Mehdili village in the Jabrayil district, as well as in nameless heights in the Goygol, Goranboy, Khojavand, Fizuli and Jabrayil districts.

24 April 2016

The armed forces of Armenia violated the ceasefire 130 times along various directions of the front using 60-mm mortars, as well as 122-mm D-30 howitzers.

From their positions in nameless heights, as well as Parakavar and Berkaber villages in the Ijevan district, Mosesgekh and Chinari villages in the Berd district and nameless heights in the Krasnoselsk district of Armenia, the armed forces of Armenia fired on the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan in Kohnagishlag village in the Aghstafa district; nameless heights and Gizilhajili village in the Gazakh district; Aghdam and Kokhanabi villages in the Tovuz district and nameless heights in the Gadabay district.

The positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan were also subjected to fire from positions in heights near Chileburt, Yarimja and Goyarkh villages in the Tartar district; Shikhlar, Bash Garvand, Kangarli, Javahirli, Sarijali and Namirli villages in the Aghdam district; Kuropatkino village in the Khojavand district; Garakhanbayli, Horadiz, Gorgan and Ashaghi Seyidahmadli villages in the Fuzuli district; and Mehdili village in the Jabrayil district, as well as in nameless heights in the Goygol, Goranboy, Khojavand, Fizuli and Jabrayil districts.

United Nations S/2016/399

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English
Original: Arabic

Identical letters dated 28 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the twenty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/384).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the positions that it has previously communicated in its identical letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council responding to the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015). It would also like to stress the following points:

1. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continues to note the attempts by the authors of the report to lend a veneer of objectivity to their treatment of certain aspects of the humanitarian situation in Syria. However, they still fail to reflect the full extent of the progress made in cooperation with the Syrian Government in delivering assistance to affected beneficiaries in both stable and unstable parts of Syria. The Government regrets that the Secretariat has tried to minimize successes achieved during March and to hold the Syrian Government responsible for any shortfalls. We note that the United Nations only initiated operations to deliver assistance to unstable areas approved under the April plan approximately halfway through that month. The Syrian Government is not responsible for that delay. The Syrian Government urges the United Nations to press States that support such armed terrorist groups as Army of Conquest, the Nusrah Front and Ahrar al-Sham to allow assistance to be delivered to several areas, including Kafraya, Fu'ah and Dayr al-Zawr, and to grant the Government access to assess the horrendous conditions in those areas. The Syrian Government also condemns the selective focus by Secretariat officials on unstable areas, which only lays bare their continued politicization of humanitarian work and belies the claims of some that their goal is to deliver humanitarian assistance to all parts of Syria.

2. The Syrian Government also deplores the Secretariat's obdurate inaccuracy with regard to the number of requests submitted to the Syrian Government. It claims that there are 72 such requests. However, since February 2016, official communications from the Office of the United Nations Resident

Coordinator addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have focused on priority areas identified following the formation of the Task Force on Humanitarian Access in Geneva in February 2016. Those are the requests to which the Syrian Government has responded; the United Nations has not repeated any mention of most of the areas cited in its request for the month of January 2016 in subsequent notes verbales. Therefore, the claim in paragraph 27 that there are 30 unanswered requests is unreasonable. Moreover, even with respect to those 30 requests, the Syrian Government is struck by the inaccuracy of the United Nations. Although two of the requests, for the Sabburah and Marbnafsah areas in Hama governorate, have been approved, that fact is not noted in the above-mentioned paragraph. The Syrian Government urges the authors of the report to be more accurate when transmitting information or conveying updates to Member States, in particular Security Council members, on requests submitted. They must also avoid inflating the numbers of requests and other figures to serve the agenda of certain parties who would malign the Syrian Government.

3. The Syrian Government is surprised that the report fails to mention that the Government had approved the delivery of medical supplies, with the exception of surgical implements and atropine, to all parts of Syria. The Syrian Government urges the United Nations to inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of any difficulties encountered by delivery operations, so that they can be addressed.

4. The Syrian Government also finds strange the bias demonstrated by the authors of the current report for the Turkish Government at the expense of affected civilians in Hasakah governorate. It is not the case that the Nusaybin border crossing has been closed temporarily since December 2015, as reported in paragraph 30. In reality, the Turkish Government has failed to approve United Nations requests to bring humanitarian aid into Hasakah governorate for political reasons. It is strange that the authors of the report should meekly accept the Turkish Government's claim about humanitarian assistance failing to reach Hasakah governorate because of the temporary closure of the Nusaybin crossing for security reasons when the Turkish Government allows the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salamah crossings to be used, although everyone, including United Nations humanitarian workers, is aware that terrorist groups are deployed on both sides of those two crossings. This means that, in practice, the Turkish Government is quite happy to deliver humanitarian assistance to armed groups.

The United Nations, the members of the Security Council, and everyone else involved in humanitarian work should press the Turkish Government to permit assistance to pass through the Nusaybin crossing into Hasakah governorate immediately.

5. The Syrian Government deplores the authors' deliberate and exclusive focus in their monthly reports on the terrorist Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) organization, while they turn a blind eye to terrorism perpetrated by the Nusrah Front and other terrorist groups allied with it or linked to Al-Qaida in the areas where those groups have a presence. Anyone reading the current report would conclude that ISIL is the only terrorist organization in Syria. In that regard, the Syrian Government strongly rejects the blatant and repeated whitewashing by the Secretariat and the Office of the Resident Coordinator in Damascus of the terrorist Nusrah Front organization and the other armed terrorist groups connected with it and with Al-Qaida, such as Ahrar al-Sham, the Levant Front, the Army of Islam, the

Army of Conquest, the Free Army and other groups that take pride in their takfirist Wahhabi affiliations and their connections with the Nusrah Front, ISIL and Al-Qaida.

6. The Syrian Government reiterates that it continues to reject the use by Secretariat officials of the term "non-State armed groups" to describe such terrorist organizations as ISIL, the Nusrah Front, Al-Qaida and groups linked to or cooperating with them that receive foreign support and funding from several Governments, notably those of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. That constitutes a flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions concerning counter-terrorism and the Charter of the United Nations. We have every right to once again put to the Secretariat our question about the legal basis on which it relies in using such terminology. We note that, to date, the Secretariat has not taken the trouble to answer that question, which only confirms the validity of the Syrian Government's position on this matter.

7. The Syrian Government reiterates that it is unacceptable for the Secretariat to base its reports on the unreliable sources from which it and other United Nations entities, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, take their information on the situation in Syria. The Government also reiterates its condemnation of the equivalence drawn by the Secretariat between counter-terrorism activities and terrorist acts; this is a clear indication that the Secretariat shares the bias of those sources of information, whose aim is to tarnish the image of the Syrian Government and its allies and undermine their counter-terrorism efforts.

8. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on dialogue among Syrians under Syrian leadership and without preconditions. It further stresses that the political approach goes hand in hand with counter-terrorism efforts, which will continue until all of the armed terrorist groups active in Syria have been eradicated. In that connection, the Syrian Government reminds the Secretariat that the Geneva meetings are meant to lead to a political solution, not some other result. It furthermore reminds the Secretariat that the success of those meetings and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people with no legal or moral basis.

9. The Syrian Government finds it deplorable that, yet again, in its twenty-sixth consecutive report, the Secretariat fails to provide any genuinely objective monitoring or reporting of the effects of the unilateral coercive economic measures, which have been imposed against Syria for more than five years, on the humanitarian and living conditions of Syrian civilians in all areas without exception. In so doing, the Secretariat is disregarding information contained in reports from certain United Nations agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, and even statements of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Syria.

10. The Syrian Government cannot accept the claims that the delivery of medical assistance is being hindered. It is astonished by the persistent and inexplicable failure of Secretariat officials to provide updated information on

medical assistance. Since the beginning of 2016, the Syrian Government has approved 10 World Health Organization (WHO) requests to deliver medical assistance to the following governorates and regions: Duma in Rif Dimashq; Raqqah governorate; Ayn Arab, Shaddadah and Ras al-Ayn in Hasakah governorate; Yabrud, Assal al-Ward, Bayt Sawa, Kafr Batna, Arbin, Zamalka, Zabdin and Mulayhah in Rif Dimashq; Idlib governorate; Jindayris, Raju, Shiran, Sirrin and Dayr Hafir in Aleppo governorate; Rastan, Talbisah, Qaryatayn, Tadmur (Palmyra) and Tall Daww in Homs Governorate; Qal'at al-Madiq, Ziyarah, Kafr Zayta, Murak, Suran and Si'in in Hama governorate; and Ayn Isa and Suluk in Raqqah governorate. It should be pointed out that the Syrian Government recently approved several requests from WHO to deliver medical assistance, including vaccinations for H1N1 influenza to Duma in Rif Dimashq and to Raqqah, and to provide dialysis sessions in Duma in Rif Dimashq. Paragraphs 20, 26 and 45 of the report note that WHO was able to deliver medical assistance to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries, including in unstable areas.

11. The Syrian Government reiterates its rejection of the Secretariat's attempts to equivocate regarding the so-called besieged areas, notably by inflating or downplaying the numbers of inhabitants in those areas in order to serve the goals of certain parties in the Organization. In its previous responses to the reports of the Secretary-General, starting in August 2015, the Syrian Government has repeatedly tried to correct the Secretariat's errors. For example, the number of people besieged in Dayr al-Zawr was 300,000 rather than 200,000 as claimed by Secretariat officials in their current report, while the number of persons besieged in Fu'ah and Kafraya was 35,000, not 12,500. The Syrian Government notes that Duma and Darayya are hubs for such armed terrorist groups as ISIL and the Army of Islam.

12. The Syrian Government reiterates its position that cross-border assistance is futile, and condemns once more the Secretariat's insistence on covering up the lack of transparency on the part of the United Nations with regard to such assistance. The notifications being sent to the Syrian Government still contain inaccurate figures, information, numbers of beneficiaries and particulars on which parties collect aid to distribute it to civilian recipients. The Syrian Government also reiterates that the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism is unable to confirm the delivery of cross-border assistance to beneficiaries. What is certain is that cross-border assistance is finding its way into the hands of the armed terrorists, or they are appropriating it, distributing some of it to their members and selling the rest to civilians at exorbitant prices on the black market. The members of the Security Council must be aware that the Turkish regime's intelligence apparatus is continuing to use the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salamah crossings to smuggle weapons and deliver them to armed terrorist groups active in Syria on the pretext of delivering cross-border assistance to Syria.

13. The Syrian Government stresses that the Secretariat should update its information on the number of foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Syria. There are now 20 registered non-governmental organizations authorized to operate in Syria, as opposed to 16 as stated in paragraph 32.

14. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to compel those States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to desist from providing any form of support and funding to those groups, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on countering terrorism

and the financing of terrorism, particularly resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015).

15. I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annexes issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex I to the identical letters dated 28 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Crimes committed by ISIL, the Nusrah Front, the Free Army, the Army of Islam, the Army of Conquest and other armed terrorist groups ignored by the authors of the report

- In the period 21 February to 21 March 2016, terrorists killed 285 civilians, including 54 children, and injured 625 civilians, including 163 children, across the governorates of Syria, not including Raqqah and Idlib.
- In the period 21 January to 21 February 2016, terrorists killed 11 civilians, including 5 children, and injured 24 civilians, including 7 children, in Dayr al-Zawr governorate.
- On 4 and 5 March, armed terrorist groups belonging to the ISIL organization fired mortar shells at the Qusur and Muwazzafin neighbourhoods of the city of Dayr al-Zawr, killing two civilians and injuring five others. Material damage was caused.
- On 6 and 7 March, an explosive device was detonated on the Aleppo-Khanasir highway while a private car was passing, killing four civilians and injuring three others.
- On 7 and 8 March, in the city of Aleppo, armed terrorist groups belonging to the so-called Nusrah Front, the Nur al-Din al-Zanki battalion, the Islamic Front, Liwa' al-Tawhid, the Badr Martyrs Brigade, the Emigrants Brigade and Northern Shield fired mortar shells and locally made missiles at the Shaykh Maqsud and Jam'iyat al-Zahra' neighbourhoods, killing seven civilians and causing material damage. On 18 April 2016, a gas cylinder missile ("hell cannon") fired at the Jam'iyat al-Zahra' area killed two children. On 19 April 2016, mortar shells fired at the Midan neighbourhood killed a woman and injured two civilians.
- On 7, 8 and 9 March, armed terrorist groups belonging to the ISIL organization fired mortar shells at the Qusur neighbourhood of Dayr al-Zawr city, killing 11 civilians and injuring 14 others. Material damage was caused.
- On 10 and 11 March, armed terrorist groups belonging to the Nusrah Front and the Rahman Corps in Duma gardens fired mortar shells at the Assad suburb in Harasta, injuring eight children with shrapnel and causing material damage.
- On 12 and 13 March, armed terrorist groups belonging to the Nusrah Front, Ahrar al-Sham and the Army of Conquest in Hirsh al-Qusaybah, located north of the village of Nabudah, fired shells at the town of Suqaylibiyah in Hama, injuring two civilians with shrapnel and causing material damage.
- On 13 and 14 March, armed terrorist groups belonging to the ISIL organization fired mortar shells at the Qusur neighbourhood of Dayr al-Zawr city, killing a woman and injuring two civilians. Material damage was caused.

- On 14 and 15 March, armed terrorist groups belonging to the ISIL organization in the village of Unq al-Hawa fired mortar shells at the town of Jubb al-Jarrah in Homs, killing two women.

- On 20 and 21 March, armed terrorist groups belonging to the ISIL organization fired mortar shells at the Harabish neighbourhood of the city of Dayr al-Zawr, killing a female child and injuring five civilians, including children. On 26 and 27 April 2016, a woman was killed and 10 civilians were injured.

- On 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25 March, in the city of Aleppo, armed terrorist groups belonging to the so-called Nusrah Front, the Nur al-Din al-Zanki battalion, the Islamic Front, Liwa' al-Tawhid, the Badr Martyrs Brigade, the Emigrants Brigade and Northern Shield located in the Rashidin, Bustan al-Qasr, Mansurah, Salah al-Din, Bani Zayd and Amiriyah neighbourhoods fired mortar shells and gas cylinder missiles at the Bustan al-Zahra', Hamdaniyah, Idha'ah, Halab al-Jadidah and Mushariqah neighbourhoods, killing two civilians and injuring 21 others. Material damage was caused.

- On 26 and 27 March, a female terrorist blew herself up with an explosive vest in Kana'is Street in the city of Ra's al-Ayn in Hasakah, killing and injuring civilians.

- On 30 and 31 March, an explosive device was detonated in the town of Buqayn, which is attached to Madaya in Rif Dimashq, killing two children and injuring another with shrapnel.

Annex II to the identical letters dated 28 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Examples of humanitarian assistance that was delivered during March 2016 thanks to the facilitation provided by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations and other international organizations, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Also listed is assistance delivered by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered humanitarian aid (food and non-food aid and medical assistance), provided from inside Syrian territory by United Nations organizations, to various governorates, including Rif Dimashq, Aleppo, Qunaytirah, Hasakah, Homs, Hama and Dar'a, but not to Raqqah or Dayr al-Zawr governorates. Some 1,908,235 Syrian beneficiaries (381,647 families) received food parcels provided by the World Food Programme through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The above-mentioned assistance was distributed by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to the governorates as follows: 51,298 parcels in Rif Dimashq; 18,815 parcels in Dar'a and its countryside; 52,000 parcels in Aleppo and its countryside; 2,320 parcels in Hasakah; 45,009 parcels in Hama and its countryside; and 75,059 parcels in Homs and its countryside.

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered humanitarian aid provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross from inside Syrian territory to most governorates, including Rif Dimashq, Qunaytirah, Dar'a, Aleppo, Hama and Homs. A total of 77,418 food parcels were delivered, in addition to 16,066 canned food parcels and food aid for community kitchens. A total of 902 food parcels provided by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were distributed in Homs, Dayr al-Zawr and Damascus governorates.

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered humanitarian aid (food and non-food aid, medical assistance, water purifiers, wheelchairs and baby food) provided by United Nations organizations and five foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Syria to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries in Aleppo, Hasakah, Rif Dimashq, Dar'a, Qunaytirah, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Suwayda', Tartus and Ladhiqiyah governorates.

- From 2014 through March 2016, a total of 129,782 food parcels and 35,380 medical parcels had been delivered to the inhabitants of the camp by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That is in addition to the ongoing operation to provide non-food aid, other foodstuffs and medical care. We also note that the Palestine refugees in Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham are inhabitants of Yarmouk camp who were displaced from the camp after the terrorist organization ISIL overran it in April 2015 in collusion with the terrorist Nusrah Front and other terrorist groups present inside the camp.